consumer electronics

# ceLifestyles™

ceLifestyles.com

# 2006 Style & Design Guide

## Pretty & Practical CE Products

## Our Favorite CE Stores

## Create A Gorgeous Scrapbook With Your Digital Photos

January 2006
$3.50 U.S.
$4.99 Canada

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The sleek, free-flowing lines of Sanus Platinum furniture reflect the beauty of today's digital televisions. And the newest addition, model PFFP flat panel TV stand, opens up possibilities to mount a flat panel television anywhere. An extruded aluminum column extends rigid strength from the steel-framed base to handle flat panel TVs up to 50". The Virtual Axis™ tilting system provides smooth motion with the touch of a fingertip. And features like a hidden cable channel, an adjustable glass shelf and a custom blended silver finish provide the perfect finishing touches to this innovative flat panel TV stand. So if your home theater is short on wall space, your options are now wide open.

SANUS | SYSTEMS

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800.359.5520 www.sanus.com

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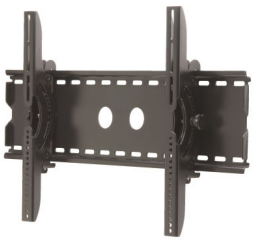
Plasma TVs are really making waves. So how do you choose a mount worthy of the splendor of a plasma TV? Easy. Choose a VisionMount™ flat panel TV wall mount from Sanus. Its simple elegance gives you one of the strongest, most durable mounts...with installation completed in just minutes. And the Virtual Axis™ mechanism allows you to adjust the tilt with an effortless fingertip touch...even if your TV weighs 175 pounds. So wherever your plasma TV is destined to be, VisionMount can easily handle your installation and positioning needs, and you can spend your time reflecting on the real beauty of your home theater.



VisionMount™ model VMPLb shown. Fits virtually any flat panel TV from 32" up to 60". Available in black and silver.

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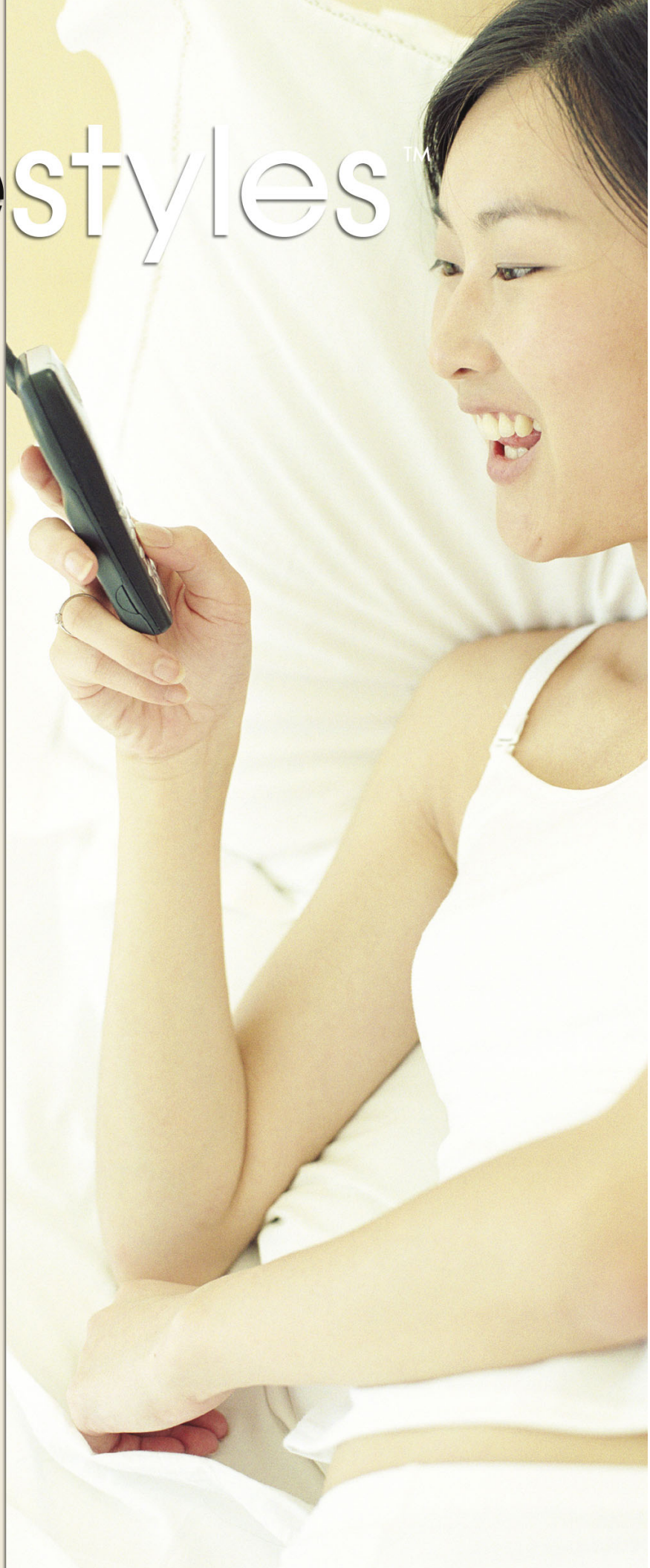

## feature topic

# 2006 Style & Design Guide

What better way to ring in the New Year than with the year's hottest products? And we don't mean the new Louis Vuitton clutch or a turquoise cashmere shrug. We love the increased focus on style and design in 2006's consumer electronics devices, and in this month's issue of *CE Lifestyles*, we'll tell you what the hottest trends and coolest looks will be for your CE gear.


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## On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T9 ($449.95; www.sony.com).


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The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?


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Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. Also, read what real women just like you are saying about how consumer electronics are affecting their everyday lives.


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## Editor's Note

You're probably expecting me to write about my New Year's resolution for 2006, and you're right. It's an overdone subject, but it's a worthy one all the same. Anything that causes us to strive to do and be better is a good thing, isn't it? I think so.

One of my resolutions is to become more socially aware next year. I've always been interested in politics, but social awareness goes further than that. So often, we Americans are focused solely on our own country, with little knowledge of what is going on in the rest of the world. How can we change that?

Using technology to help us bridge that gap is a good first step. One of the things that started me thinking about being more socially aware in the first place was watching television in Paris recently. I am always impressed about how encompassing the nightly news is in European countries, not only for that continent, but for others, as well. Sure, we have daily reports on what's going on in Iraq and Afghanistan, but American news usually doesn't stray far from something in which Americans are involved. Becoming more socially aware next year can involve a change as minor as watching BBC instead of CNN or something as major as subscribing to digital cable for international news channels. In this case, TV is a very good thing.

If you're not a TV-watcher or a news addict, explore your radio and music options. One of the coolest things about satellite radio is that we can easily listen to world music, which is a fun and lighthearted way to try to understand different cultures. And get the whole family involved—use music as a conversation starter to talk with your kids about different countries and customs.

We don't need political science degrees to become more socially aware. When we strive to use technology that we're already familiar with to learn about different cultures, forming connections with our international brothers and sisters becomes easier than ever. This is a great resolution in my book.

Live well, friends.

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# ce news

Compiled by Rachel Derowitsch

## A New Look For The Digital Living Room

Given the rivalry between gaming consoles Xbox and PlayStation, a collaboration between Microsoft and Sony may seem the least likely of pairings. But the two have teamed up on the new Sony VAIO XL1 Digital Living System ($2,999.99; www.sonystyle.com/xl1), which comprises a PC running Windows XP Media Center 2005 and a 200-disc media changer/recorder. With the help of the operating system, which automatically detects any disc you insert into the disc changer, you can use the remote or wireless keyboard to manage your CD/DVD library, including discs you've made and those with prerecorded content.

## And The Winner Is . . . Blu-ray

The ongoing battle between two competing high-definition DVD formats that haven't been released yet has been decided, according to Forrester Research. The Massachusetts-based technology and market research firm predicts Blu-ray will ultimately win out over HD DVD. The two formats are scheduled for release this spring.

However, a summary of the Forrester report that declares Blu-ray the winner states that "unless the HD-DVD group abandons the field, it will be another two years before consumers are confident enough of the winner to think about buying a new format DVD player. In the meantime, they will expand their video-on-demand, downloadable video, and Internet video habits." Sony, Philips, Panasonic, and Pioneer are among the manufacturers who are developing Blu-ray DVD players and recorders (see www.blu-ray.com).

# MIT Media Lab

## Announces $100 Laptop Campaign

MIT Media Lab (laptop.media.mit.edu) has announced that it will develop a $100 laptop by the end of 2006 or early 2007, in collaboration with the nonprofit One Laptop Per Child program, created by Media Lab chairman and co-founder Nicholas Negroponte. The lab intends to market the laptops directly to education ministries around the world so they can distribute them as they would textbooks. The Linux-based laptops will have a full-color display, 1GB of memory, and several USB ports. They will also rely on more unique sources of power, including a crank.

# McDonald's

## Gets Wi-Fi Connections For Nintendo Gamers

Ever wonder what to do with bored kids who've outgrown the McDonald's PlayPlace? Nintendo has the answer: The gaming company has teamed with Wayport, an Internet service provider, to provide free Wi-Fi access at almost 6,000 McDonald's restaurants in the United States for users of Nintendo DS, a new wireless gaming system.

## Americans Are Watching

# More TV Than Ever

Nielsen Media Research reports that the average U.S. home watched more television during the 2004–05 TV season than in any previous season since the firm began monitoring television viewing in the 1950s. The average household tuned in for 8 hours, 11 minutes each day, up 2.7% from the previous season and 12.5% higher than 10 years ago.

m a r k e t p l a c e

## Consumers' Home Theater Wishes May Expand Product Lines

A survey by the NPD Group shows that more than half of respondents cite some type of physical limitation as a reason for not installing a home-theater system: small room size (26%); aesthetic reasons, such as exposed cables (23%); or no desire to remodel or reconstruct their home (9%).

These consumer concerns, however, could lead to innovative products that circumvent the problems. "These types of physical limitations should provide a good opportunity for manufacturers to expand their product lines and their consumer base by catering to the needs of the potential buyer and altering the current designs," says Ross Rubin, director of industry analysis for NPD.

The survey questioned people who have a home-theater system, who plan to install one within the next year, and who are not interested in such a system. The poll of more than 5,400 adults also found:

• Among home-theater owners, 30% chose a theater-in-a-box system, while more than 50% connected separate components.

• 10% of home-theater owners say they plan to connect either a satellite radio receiver or portable MP3 player to the system.

• 62% of home-theater owners have a DVD player; 22% have a DVD/VCR combo; 12% have a DVD recorder.

*Source: The NPD Group*

## Payless Shoe Source Tops Online Customer Survey

Payless Shoe Source came out on top in the latest Customer Respect Group survey of 53 major online retailers. Payless earned a CRI (Customer Respect Index) rating of 8.1, a fraction higher than second place CVS (8.0). The CRI is based on the evaluation of a site's simplicity, responsiveness, transparency, principles, attitude, and privacy.

| Retailer | CRI |
|---|---|
| 1. Payless Shoe Source | 8.1 |
| 2. CVS | 8.0 |
| 3. L.L. Bean | 7.9 |
| 4. Liz Claiborne | 7.9 |
| 5. Blockbuster | 7.8 |
| 6. dvd empire | 7.8 |
| 7. Wal-Mart | 7.8 |
| 8. Nike | 7.7 |
| 9. Amazon.com | 7.6 |
| 10. Barnes & Noble | 7.6 |

## tidbits

Ecommerce will represent 13% of all U.S. retail sales in 2010, led by travel-related purchases.
*Source: Forrester Research*

DIRECTV now offers more than 65 channels of XM Satellite Radio programming to its Total Choice Plus subscribers.
*Source: TWICE*

Best Buy was named top national retailer by readers in the second annual TWICE Retail Excellence Awards.
*Source: TWICE*

Google has designated $265 million for charitable causes, including $2 million given to the One Laptop Per Child program.
*Source: The New York Times*

Women made 53% of all digital camera purchases from May to July 2005.
*Source: NPD Group*

The luxury goods retailing market in the United States was $445 billion in 2005.
*Source: MindBranch*

## Meet our expert Julie

**Home A/V Editor, CrutchfieldAdvisor.com**

*"Just about every day, I come across a cool product which strikes me as perfect for someone I know. I've shared some of my favorites here."*

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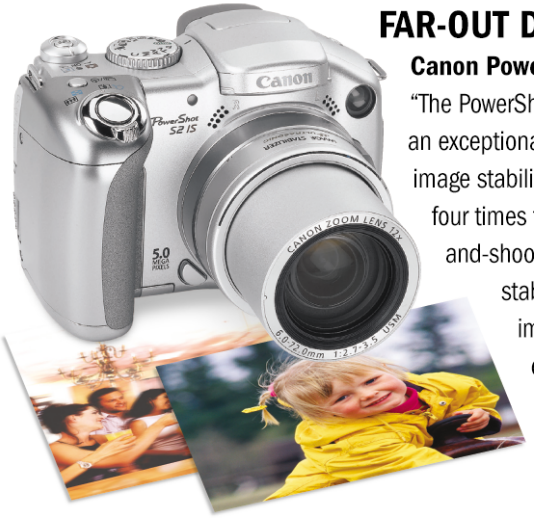
# Expert picks

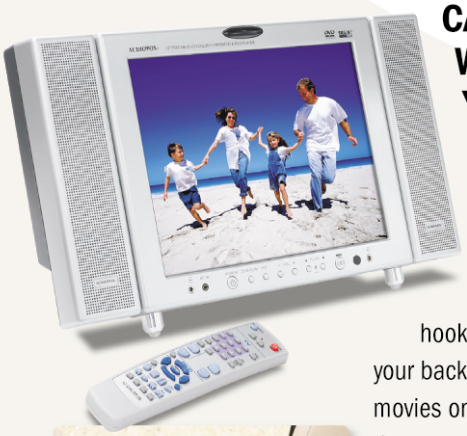



## FAR-OUT DIGITAL SHOOTING

**Canon PowerShot S2 IS**

"The PowerShot S2 IS is a great camera with an exceptional stand out: a 12X zoom lens with image stabilization. With that zoom, you've got four times the zoom capability of most point-and-shoot digital cameras. And with image stabilization, you avoid the blurry images that are so common with extensive zoom."

*Canon PowerShot S2 IS*
#280PSS2IS



## CAR VIDEO, WHENEVER YOU WANT IT

**Audiovox D1210**

"What I like best about the D1210 is that it's not permanent. You can hook it up for trips, and let your backseat audience enjoy movies on the 10" screen all the way to the beach. And then you can tuck it away until the next outing."

*Audiovox D1210* #220D1210

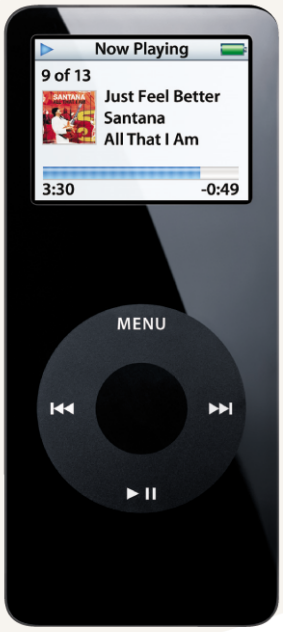
## SLIMMED-DOWN MUSIC TO GO

**Apple iPod nano**

"Everything Apple had to say about the nano is true — these things are just plain *cool*. They work like larger iPods — which is to say they make it easy to listen to hours and hours of music — but they've got a super-slim design and a beautiful color screen to boot. And there are plenty of accessories you can choose to spice up the look of your nano."

*2GB Apple iPod nano*
*White* #4722GNANOW
*Black* #4722GNANOB

*4GB Apple iPod nano*
*White* #4724GNANOW
*Black* #4724GNANOB

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BY GREGORY ANDERSON

# shelfwatch

The holidays mean pictures. And lots of them. These new products will help you capture, manage, and share all that post-holiday cheer.

## Sony Cyber-shot DSC-N1

**$499.95 • www.sonystyle.com**

With its slim profile and beautiful 3-inch view screen, Sony's latest Cyber-shot can rely on its good looks. But its 8MP sensor and 500-photo onboard album ensure that it won't have to.

## Apple Video iPod

**$299 or $399 • www.apple.com**

The hits just keep on coming. Apple's latest iteration of the iconic iPod offers video playback on its 2.5-inch screen. Download your favorite TV shows and other videos from iTunes or copy your own to the 30 or 60GB hard drive.

## Westinghouse Digital Photo Frame

$149.99 • www.westinghousedigital.com

Why keep just one picture of your honey on the desk? The Westinghouse Digital Photo Frame displays all your favorite shots, in single or slideshow mode, in four interchangeable frame styles and colors. Fill up the 8MB internal memory (up to 30 pictures) or just insert your memory card. An on-screen menu provides thumbnail previews and display options.

## Motorola i930 Smartphone

$499.99 • www.sprint.com

Shoot photos or video and then email or store the results with this deceptively small clamshell. Sprint Nextel services gives you push-to-talk options, and the Windows Mobile operating system opens the door to all kinds of applications.

## Canon PIXMA MP950 Printer All-in-One

$449.99 • www.usa.canon.com

Print those great shots from the school play yourself. Canon's latest all-in-one machine acts as a regular text printer and scanner and also prints seven-color photos with a 9,600 x 2,400 resolution. The 3.6-inch LCD lets you preview pics when printing directly from CompactFlash, SD, MMC, or Memory Stick media.

open

# outfit your life

## Accessories With Style

For auld lang syne.

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE

**Large Milano**
$119.99 • www.mobileedge.com

You'd better not be working on New Year's Eve. But just in case you can't avoid it, here's a laptop bag you can put with a little black dress and leave nobody the wiser. The Large Milano by MobileEdge features a zippered faux-suede lining and a removable wristlet for cosmetics and accessories.

**PEK Wine Steward**
$199 • peksystems.com

On the off chance you end the Eve with a bottle of wine opened but unfinished, PEK Preservation Systems is here to keep that vino keeno until the next glass. The Wine Steward uses argon gas and thermal engineering to minimize oxidation for up to two weeks. You ought to be just about ready to cheat on those resolutions by then . . .

**Vaja iVod Crystal iPod Case**
$340 • www.vajacases.com

Here's a little New Year's Eve glamour for your 20 or 60GB iPod: the iVod case by Vaja. Genuine Swarovski crystals nestled in soft full grain Argentine cowhide. The case is padded and offers a leather strap with silver appliqués. You can get it in six color combinations, each handmade to order.

**Nooka Zot Watch**
$250 • www.elsewares.com

Count in the new year a new way with this stainless steel timepiece by Nooka. Forget the big and little hands: the Zot has dots, 12 of them in all; one to indicate each passing hour. A progress bar indicates the minutes; seconds appear as digits in their own window. The band comes in black, beige, orange, or moon blue, all with a stainless steel buckle. Midnight is up to you.

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Quickly and easily edit your digital photos using the control of the Graphire pen and your included copy of Adobe® Photoshop® Elements 3. Selectively apply high-quality photographic enhancements using the included nik Color Efex Pro™ 2 GE filter collection.

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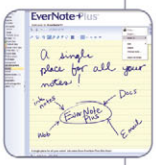
### Jot notes, mark-up, and sign

Use your Graphire pen on a PC with the included software to annotate Microsoft® Office documents (JustWrite Office™ 4) and to jot instantly retrievable notes (Evernote Plus™). On a Mac, use your Graphire pen to enjoy all the digital-inking capabilities of Apple® Inkwell®.

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## Shopping Site Of The Month

# eDressMe

## www.edressme.com

Finding that perfect little black dress has never been easier. In fact, with the selection and variety at eDressMe (www.edressme.com), finding *any* dress has never been easier. Formal or casual, prom or wedding, eDressMe has enough dresses to make any girl lose her mind.

### At A Glance

The eDressMe site is pretty straightforward, with categories listed along the left side of the home page to help you navigate through the more than 1,000 styles available. Main categories (including Dresses, Designer Brands, and Trends) are divided into subcategories, so you can see everything the site has to offer at a glance. Although the site's focus is obviously dresses, it has other goodies to check out, too: The Separates and Accessories categories include sweaters, shrugs, shoes, and more.

Several other categories are across the top of the home page to show you what's new, what's coming, and what's hot. This is also where you'll find eDressMe's contact and customer service information.

### Let The Shopping Begin

While the obvious way to start searching for the dress of your dreams is to click the links on the left, the Dress Finder can help you narrow your prospects. The feature is a little tricky to find, but it may be worth the extra clicks depending on what you're looking for. From the home page, scroll to the very bottom and click the Site Map link (located right above the Copyright notice). The lengthy Site Map listings are alphabetized, so scroll down the page until you see the Dress Finder link and click it.

The Dress Finder gives you five categories to help you define the dress you are looking for. Because we hadn't seen many casual dresses while browsing the site, we decided to use the Dress Finder to try to find one that we were interested in. To start our quest, we selected Any in the Brand column (because we were more interested in the look of the dress rather than the designer), and because it's cold in Nebraska in January, we chose Long Sleeve in the Style column. After pondering the Fabric choices (including Lace, Matte Jersey, and Taffeta, to name a few), we decided on Cotton for the comfort factor. We also chose All in the Occasion column and Plus in the Shape column.

After clicking the Find! button below the categories, we discovered that Dress Finder uses your specifications to perform a word search of item descriptions. A color-coded system labels whether Dress Finder found words, words together, or all words in its results. For our search above, all we found were results with Words Found, so our matches were not exactly what we'd expected. However, when we changed our search to options that were a little more common for a formal dress like those we had seen often on the site (Brand: Any, Style: Sleeveless, Fabric: Chiffon, Occasion: Evening, and Shape: Any), we found many dresses that matched what we had requested.

The good news is that even if the Dress Finder doesn't find the perfect dress for you, you can likely still find it by browsing the site's seemingly endless choices. And isn't that really more fun, anyway? Now all you need is the perfect necklace and earrings to wear with your perfect dress.

BY JOY MARTIN

Brilliantly Simple

# Wobulation.
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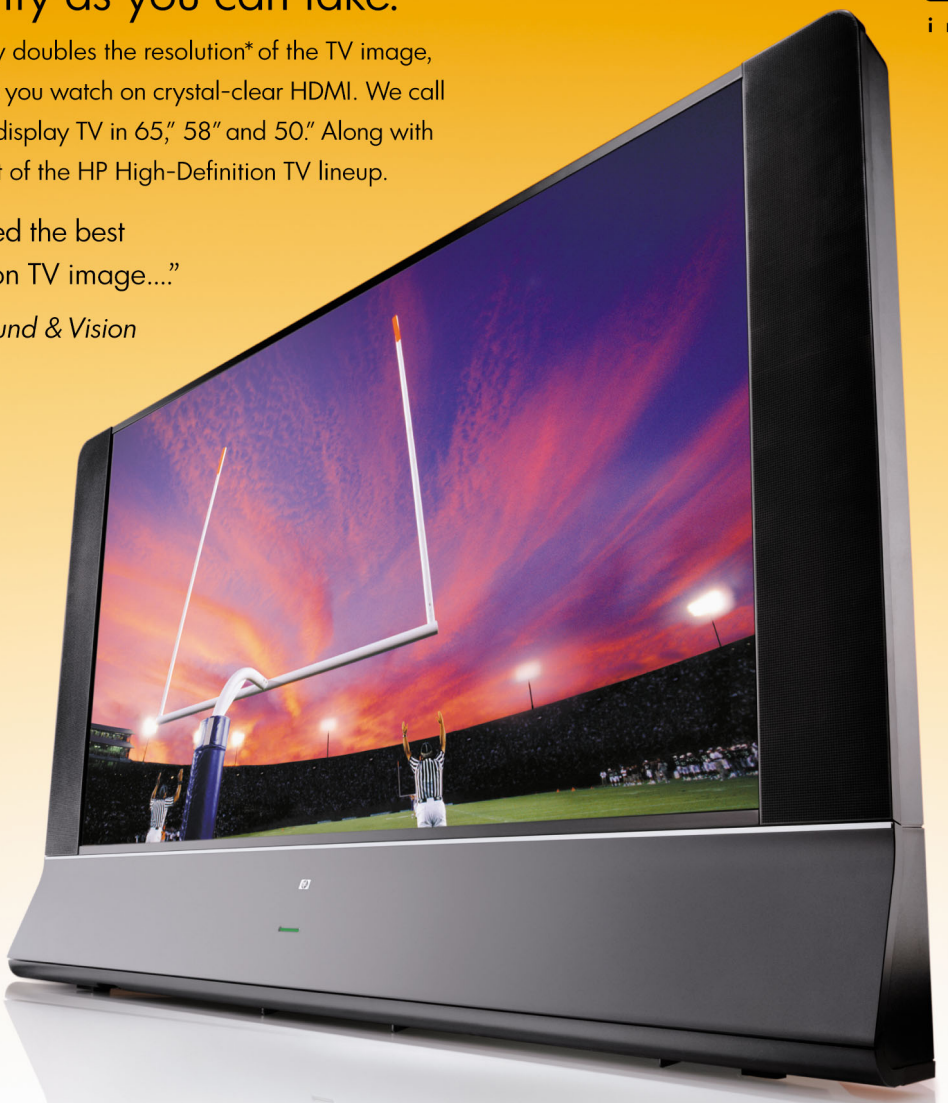
*— Sound & Vision*



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*Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.*

# His . . .

If there's one positive thing about having enemies, it's that I have a pretty good handle on their identities. Unfortunately, even though I'm well aware of two particular bad guys, that doesn't stop them from pestering me on a daily basis. I call them Hustle and Bustle. I'm busy, and it seems the second I'm ready to relax, Hustle and Bustle rear their ugly, time-consuming heads.

That's why I feel fortunate to have Creative's Zen Vision as an ally in my perpetual struggle against busyness. Because I can take virtually any kind of media file with me, the Zen Vision and its 30GB storage will satisfy all of my entertainment desires, whether I'm away on vacation or working late in the office.

I admit I wasn't too jazzed when the petite yin to my yang notified me we'd be taking the Zen Vision for a spin this month, but this little marvel makes me wonder how I could have ever been so enthralled in a portable device that simply played music.

I concede the Zen Vision is downright bulky when placed beside Apple's "Why don't you eat something?" iPod nano. It's simply too big to make a suitable jogging companion, but I can't think of too many physical shortcomings beyond that. It still fits in a jacket or back pocket with relative ease. Plus, when I tire of my own tunes, I can use the Zen Vision's built-in FM radio to tune into an even larger selection of music.

But there are two sides to every coin, and there's a reason for the Zen Vision's size—a 3.7-inch TFT LCD display. Video files looked great, and the sheer size of the Zen Vision's screen makes it rival smaller portable DVD players. I thought it displayed black as more of a dark grey, but the contrast was acceptable compared to similar screens.

Combining a digital music player with a photo album that plays videos saves me time, but its ultimate convenience lies in its compatibility with TiVoToGo. I can use my TiVo Series 2 DVR to record an episode of "Arrested Development" or Game 4 of the World Series and transfer it from the TiVo to the Zen Vision, using a PC as the middleman. I can then connect the Zen Vision to a hotel room TV with its A/V Out jack and watch my shows on the TV instead of the Zen Vision's screen. Essentially, the Zen Micro is capable of adding "portable DVR" to its long list of credentials. That, kiddies, is CE at its finest.

Creative Zen Vision • $399.99 • www.creative.com

Creative also made the Zen Micro easy to use, and the Zen Micro itself boasts a slick, inviting user interface. Apple's new 30GB iPod might have video support and cost $100 less, but when you factor in the cost of an iPod Universal Dock, a smaller screen, and no support for TiVoToGo, the Zen Vision remains my personal media player of choice.

BY VINCE COGLEY

# & Hers CE

I have a friend who insists on putting all of his valuable consumer electronics in sandwich baggies—a strange and yet clever idea if you think about it. A sandwich baggie would keep your MuVo TX-FM MP3 player dry if you're jogging and it starts to rain (or if you sweat profusely), and it helps keep the headphone cords untangled when you cram it into your purse. Also, a sandwich bag would keep your Sony DSC-T5 camera clean and dry and protect the delicate LCD.

You don't need a sandwich baggie, however, for the latest device Vince and I got our hands on because this device comes with its own velvet-like, black, drawstring bag. In this small bag, you can carry Creative's Zen Vision, and I even managed to cram the headphones, my driver's license, some cash, and a tube of lipstick in with the PMP (personal media player) for a night out on the town.

But I digress; it's not the Zen Vision's bag, but the Vision itself that impressed me. For me, it comes in handy mostly on the road. I tested the Vision during my morning and evening commutes and found it to be the perfect device for a woman on the move who doesn't want to lug around a portable DVD player, MP3 player, camera, and personal organizer just to watch a couple of movies, listen to some music, and stay organized.

Although the Vision's LCD (3.7 inches) isn't as big as what you'll get with most portable DVD players, it is beautifully sharp and vivid even in sunlight. The only drawback to this screen is that it has a very narrow viewing angle.

In general, this is a one-person device when it comes to video, but listening to music is a different story. Although I used the headphones the majority of the time, I used its tiny built-in speakers to share particularly inspiring music. It's always good to break up the monotony with a little Sheryl Crow when you're stuck in a work zone traveling 25mph.

When we were at a standstill on Interstate 80 with nothing to look at but corn, I created what should be an Emmy-nominated slideshow with the help of some "Creative Vision" to cheer everyone up. I included some "Windy City" music to spice it up, which was much more entertaining than just passing around my digital camera.

At the end of the day, I wouldn't use the Vision much if I didn't commute to work every day, but I think it's one of the best PMPs out there for the traveler who wants her video, music, photos, and organizer all in one bag.

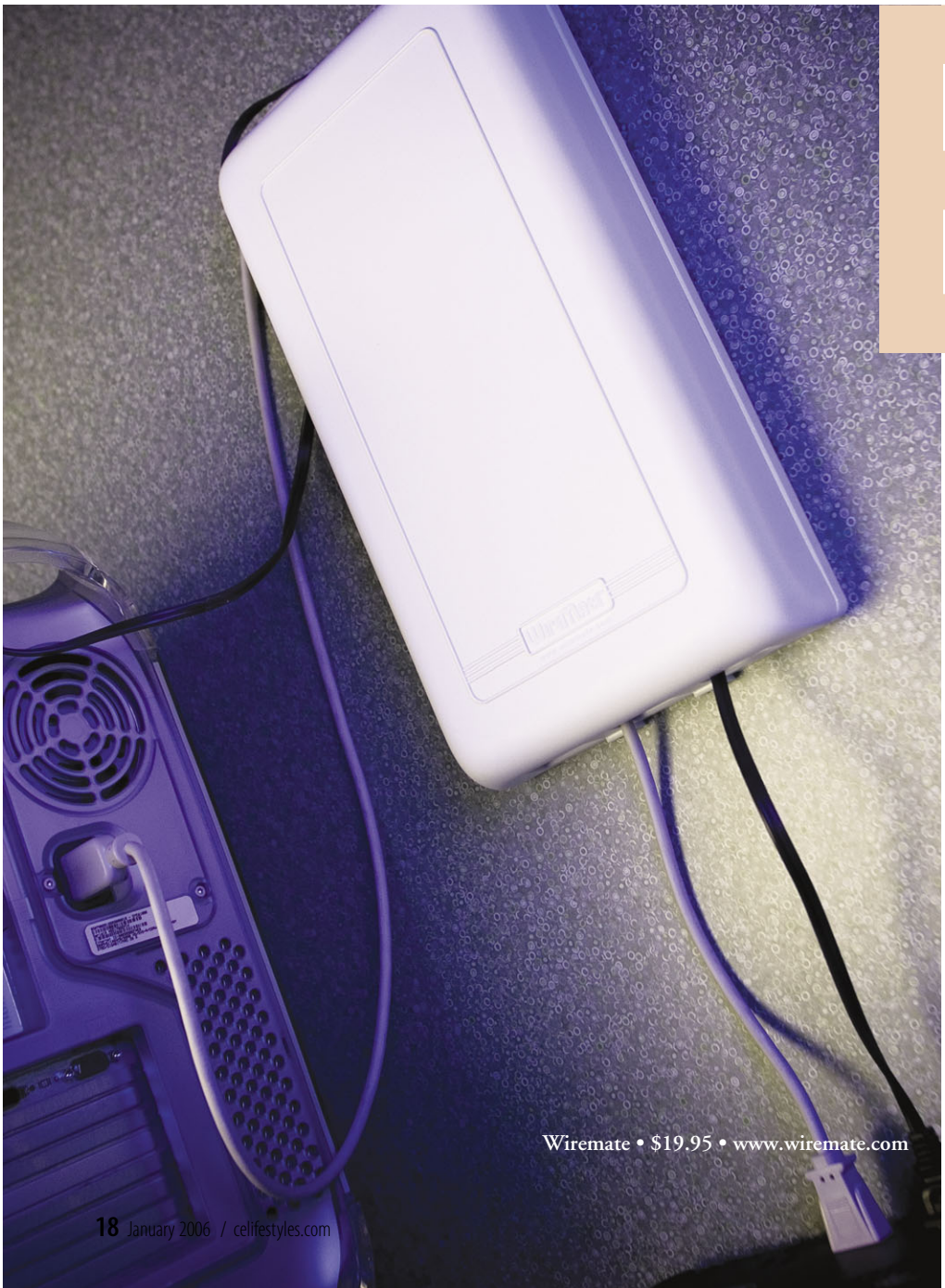
Truthfully, though, I'd still recommend keeping a sandwich baggie in your purse. CE

BY TRISTA KUNCE

Creative Zen Vision
$399.99
www.creative.com

# Whip Your Wires Into Shape

## Cable Management Products Keep Your A/V Cords Organized



Wiremate • $19.95 • www.wiremate.com

Ever noticed anything funny about those fabulous-looking shots of audio and video gear you see in glossy advertising spreads? Where are the wires? Even with a minimum amount of equipment, your living room turns into a rat's nest of cords that collect dust, pose hazards to kids and pets, and—let's face it—look unsightly.

It'll be a long time before electricity and high-quality audio and video can be delivered wirelessly to all of our devices, but with the right cable management gear, you can make any room look like those A/V ads. You just need money and a little bit of information about the products that will work best in your situation. We unfortunately can't help with the cash, but we have you covered on the info.

### Tie 'Em Up

The cheapest way to manage cords is to buy a product designed to bundle them up or artificially shorten them. Look to see how many cables you need to manage and how thick they are individually and as a group and then decide which of the following products best meets your needs.

**Cable clips and ties.** If you only have a few cables to tidy up, clips and ties are

the simplest and cheapest options because you can usually get dozens for a few bucks. If you use cable ties, don't pull them too tightly if possible; leaving a small gap will let you snake another cable through the loop later or adjust cables that are already there. You generally must cut cable ties to remove them, but the more expensive ties are fully adjustable and releasable.

Good cable clips cost only about a dollar each and come with Velcro, adhesive, suction cups, or other fasteners that let you attach them to the inside of an entertainment center, the side of a desk, or just about anywhere else. The nice thing about clips, aside from the low price and installation flexibility, is that they release easily if you need to swap out cables. The downside is that most clips only hold a few cables that aren't too thick, so they aren't good for heavy-duty use.

**Cord wraps.** The problem with many cords is that they are too long; this is where cord wraps come into play. Just wind the excess cable around the cord wrap to shorten it without having to cut or splice anything. Many retailers carry the popular Cable Turtle ($5.99 and up), which comes in a variety of colors and two sizes. The rubber shell looks like two bowls stuck together but flips open to make it easy to wrap cords and then flips back down to tightly secure them.

If you're looking for something that can accommodate more cords than even a large Cable Turtle can swallow, consider something bigger, such as the Cord Caddy, which is available exclusively at CableOrganizer.com ($19.99; www.cableorganizer.com). It's a plastic rectangle with hooks that face opposite directions, like those found on the back of most upright vacuum cleaners. Wrap several cords around it as many times as necessary, and they stay put and off the floor.

## Bend, Don't Break

When wrapping or routing wires, the golden rule is to never, ever crimp the cable. Doing so increases your chance of snapping internal metal, fiber-optic, or other necessary strands, which would ruin the cable.

This is especially true for fiber-optic cable, which contains a hair-thin strand of glass through which a laser light passes. The strand is flexible enough to bend and even loop (provided the loops are relatively large), but it breaks easily if the cable is bent too severely or is crushed. Be extremely careful when routing this type of cable through a tube and never use it with a cord wrap or similar product. ●

Geist Flexiduct • Prices vary • www.geistmfg.com

**Tubes and sleeves.** Cord wraps are nice for a few cords, but they have some downsides. They aren't ideal for hiding a large number of thick cords, like the cable you use for cable television or the bundles of cables used to carry audio and video signals between your DVD player and TV. Also, bending certain cables isn't a good idea (see the "Bend, Don't Break" sidebar for more on that), but all is not lost thanks to flexible tubes and sleeves that you can cut to any length. These products are typically made out of corrugated plastic or cloth mesh, and you should look for tubes and sleeves that are split down their entire length. The split makes it easy to add or remove individual cables and also makes it easy to let cables enter and exit at varying places to account for the positioning of all your A/V gear. Geist Manufacturing (www.geistmfg.com) and other companies offer split, flexible tubing in a variety of diameters; prices vary.

### Raceways

If tubing is still too unsightly and you have long enough cables to work with, one of the best-looking solutions is a cable raceway. A raceway is generally made from stiff plastic that conforms to walls and can be painted to match the room it is in. Many also have several different channels cast into the plastic, so they can keep wires separate from one another to avoid cross-interference problems.

Some of the most interesting products in this category come from Wiretracks (prices vary; www.wiretracks.com). The wiretracks can integrate into your existing baseboard or crown molding to make wires invisible. The baseboard or crown molding attaches directly to the cover of a plastic channel that runs along the floor or ceiling, and to add, remove, or adjust cables, you simply pop off the cover (along with the molding) and make the adjustments before snapping the cover back on. The major caveat is that installation requires remodeling know-how and tools and is probably best left to professionals.

Raceways aren't just for the walls, either. If you need to run cables across a room entrance or another empty part of the room, you can thread them through a plastic or rubber duct that sits flat on the floor. One example is Geist's Flexiduct product (price varies by distributor), which has a flat bottom and a curved top and is available in a variety of lengths and widths. You can secure it to the floor with double-sided tape, and it is available in several neutral colors, so there's a good chance you can somewhat blend it into your décor. And isn't that what it's all about? ce

BY TRACY BAKER

## Safety & Cords

Obviously it's a good idea to keep cords away from kids and pets, but there are other guidelines you should use to be sure safety is the top priority for everyone in your home.

### do

- Buy cords with the UL (Underwriters Laboratories) or ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratories) mark, which shows that samples of the cords have been tested to meet these organizations' safety standards
- Replace wall outlets that let plugs dangle loosely
- Check power strip fuses
- Check cords for heat problems

### don't

- Use nails, staples, or pins to attach cords to a wall or floor
- File the blades of a polarized plug or cut off grounding pins
- Use indoor extension cords outdoors (check the label)
- Plug a power strip into another power strip
- Use extension cords as a replacement for permanent wiring
- Run an electric cord under a rug, couch, or anything else that's flammable

## Cord Organizers For Your Computer

All of the products discussed in this article work just as well with computer cords as they do with A/C cords. However, often the best way to organize computer cords is a product specifically designed to help computer users manage cables. For example, the Cable-Safe DeskClamp Kit ($34.95; www.cable-safe.com) shortens cables and lifts all cables off of the floor, including the power strip. If your computer desk has a hole with a grommet to allow cables to pass through the top, you can clamp the kit onto the desk using the hole and then you can wrap, tie, and hook all of your cables onto the DeskClamp Kit.

Wiremate ($19.95; www.wiremate.com) is a plastic box designed to consolidate and organize multiple computer cords. It attaches to the wall or the side or back of a desk and contains multiple internal hooks around which you can wind the wires. Once everything is neatly wrapped, pop the cover on to conceal the cords. ●

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# The Perfect Earphones

## Something For Every Occasion

BY GREGORY ANDERSON

Admit it. Those headphones they pass out on airplanes aren't exactly great sounding. Or particularly flattering. And the pair that came with your portable movie player isn't your most comfortable accessory. So why settle for less? Too many people never think to explore headphone options and, consequently, miss out on a perfect fit. But you don't have to. We'll highlight half a dozen pairs perfect for whatever you're passionate about.

Pioneer SE-DIR800C
$399• www.pioneerelectronics.com

If You're Looking For:

## A WORKOUT WARRIOR

### YOU'LL NEED

Comfort and a good fit. Earphones for exercising need to be light and stay out of the way, but they need to do more than that. They should also be comfortable. "No pain, no gain" might work fine for toning up, but it doesn't do a bit of good for your ears. And workout 'phones have to stay put, as well. After all, if you aren't moving around, you aren't exercising. Finally, they should be durable and ready to meet the same physical demands you're making on your body.

### OUR RECOMMENDATION

Koss KSC75 SportClip • $19.95• www.koss.com

### WHY WE RECOMMEND IT

Koss' SportClip headphones fit snugly around the ear without a distracting or uncomfortable headband. The clips are adjustable, ensuring a close fit that won't come loose during your workout. As for bonus features—which do you prefer? The acclaimed audio quality or the sub-$20 price tag? It doesn't really matter: You get both.

If You're Looking For:

## A TRAVELING COMPANION

### YOU'LL NEED

Something small that provides a sense of privacy. The only thing that may trump packing light is getting away from it all; however, earphones for the road should accomplish both. Compact size and light weight are crucial for traveling gear. Both ear buds and folding models fit the bill, and you may want a compact carrying case, so you can stash them away during takeoff and landing. As for isolation, you can go two routes: Electronic noise canceling, available on many models, attempts to block out ambient noise with canceling frequencies, but often a good seal with form-fitting, in-canal tips blocks even more outside noise and provides better sound to boot.

### OUR RECOMMENDATION

Etymotic 6i Isolator
NOW AVAILABLE IN WHITE OR BLACK
• $149
• www.etymotic.com

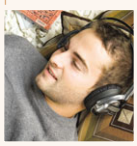
### WHY WE RECOMMEND IT

Etymotic's in-ear models are tiny and stow in a convenient pouch. They eliminate outside noise so well you'll have to watch for visual clues to know when to remove them on the plane. They aren't cheap, but they're very comfortable (and come with several types of ear tips). They're renowned for their audio quality and come with a convenient travel pouch.

If You're Looking For:

## A FILM FRIEND

### YOU'LL NEED



Portable surround sound. Comfort, style, and price are important considerations for all headphones. When you're settling in for your favorite flick, however, you want something more. Surround sound enhances the theater experience in any environment. Why should headphones be any different? Several models offer virtual surround and other effects without a roomful of speakers or a floor full of cables, which means you won't be tethered to the couch by your headphones either. New, wireless headphones provide that freedom without sacrificing sound quality.

### OUR RECOMMENDATION

Pioneer SE-DIR800C
• $399 • www.pioneerelectronics.com

### WHY WE RECOMMEND IT

These closed-cup 'phones sound great. They're Dolby Digital compatible, so you can enjoy all your soundtracks just as they were created. And they're wireless, so you don't have to deal with straggling cords. They're comfortable enough to get through the longest of the classics and less expensive than a surround speaker system.

If You're Looking For:

## JUST THE BASICS

### YOU'LL NEED

Something cheap and reliable. Sometimes you don't want to upgrade. Sometimes you're happy with exactly what you have. But sometimes things break down or get lost, too. If you're perfectly happy with the little ear buds that came with your music player or other portable device and want nothing more than a cheap replacement, you have plenty of options. Look for a reliable brand, sturdy construction, and a good price.

### OUR RECOMMENDATION

Sony MDR-E818LP Fontopia Ear-Bud Headphones
- $8.99
- www.sonystyle.com

### WHY WE RECOMMEND IT

No frills, no muss, no fuss: That's what these Fontopia Ear-Buds offer. Simple ear buds don't require adjustment or accommodation, and the Sony brand guarantees basic quality in construction and audio reproduction. You won't need special controls or features, and the ear buds don't need additional configuring or fiddling. Just plug them in and play.

If You're Looking For:

## A MUSIC APPRECIATION MOMENT

### YOU'LL NEED

For the audiophile in you (or in your life), sound quality is paramount. When you sit back to enjoy your favorite albums in the comfort of your home, portability and all those other trifling concerns go out the window. You want immersion and sound quality, which require you to control the listening environment. You can't get much more control than in the closed systems of headphones. If you're serious about music, you're probably willing to pay a little more, as well.

### OUR RECOMMENDATION

AKG Acoustics K 701
- $399
- www.akg.com

### WHY WE RECOMMEND IT

AKG Acoustics' signature models are uncompromising in their audio reproduction. You'll be set adrift in depth and clarity you didn't know your music possessed. Of course, you'll need high-quality components for playback and amplification, but your "last mile" will be well taken care of. You can get similar effects with thousands of dollars of high-end speakers, but why not discover joy in a smaller package (and in saving all that money)?

If You're Looking For:

## A WORKING RELATIONSHIP

### YOU'LL NEED

Comfort and quality. Most of us enjoy listening to music while we work, and desktop speakers aren't a viable option for those of us who work in an open office. A good pair of work headphones is a necessity, and as you'll be wearing them for long stretches, they'd better be comfortable, too. And if you're listening for roughly eight hours a day, they also need to sound great. Style helps, too—you're dressed for success and don't want to kill the effect by looking like a nerdy DJ wannabe.

### OUR RECOMMENDATION

Sennheiser PX100
- $59.95
- www.sennheiserusa.com

### WHY WE RECOMMEND IT

Sennheiser has a sterling reputation for audio quality, and the PX100 headphones live up to it. They produce great natural sound with comfortable cups and a flexible headband that works either on your head or behind your neck. They're discreet, stylish, and won't burn through your paycheck. If only all work accessories could combine those three qualities.

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Sanus reinvents style in your own home with new Java furniture. Exotic hardwood in a luscious espresso finish, with the added contemporary flair of extruded aluminum and fluted glass, creates the newest tide in contemporary décor. As with all Sanus furniture, the Java line is built with unique A/V features such as extra-deep shelving, large wire channels and removable back panels. Features that set Sanus furniture apart from the crowd...like an escape to a secluded tropical isle.

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# tips

## Music For Your Kids

### 1 Get To Know Your Kids

With your kids, listen to MP3s at online stores, such as Apple iTunes, to learn their musical preferences and give you a comfortable situation in which you can talk about what type of music you think is appropriate for their ages. Then help them burn their favorites onto a CD and use software such as the Acoustica CD/DVD Label Maker ($21.95; www.acoustica.com) to create a CD label and cover. You'll be able to gently guide their song selections while ensuring the lyrics are suitable, and they'll remember the time they spent with you each time they listen to the CD.

### 2 Let The Kids Pick The Music

If you are having a theme party, casual get-together, or night at home with the family, let your kids choose some music for the evening. If you are having people over to your home, give your children some guidance about what kind of music you would like to hear, show them a range of CDs or playlists on your computer from which they can choose, and then let them pick their favorite 10 songs. Promise them that you will play their song choices throughout the evening and watch them enjoy the party entertainment along with your other family members and guests.

### 3 Watch The Volume Levels

Over time, medium to high volume levels can take a toll on your kids' hearing. They can listen to softer sounds, such as normal conversation or a low volume song, for a long period of time without damaging their hearing, but if they listen to much louder sounds, such as a stereo at a high volume level, even for a short amount of time, they can suffer permanent hearing loss. Keep the volume at a low to medium level and let your kids know the house rules for stereo volume levels. Also educate them about the dangers of turning up the volume of their MP3 players too high, as loud sound from earbuds flowing directly into eardrums can be especially harmful.

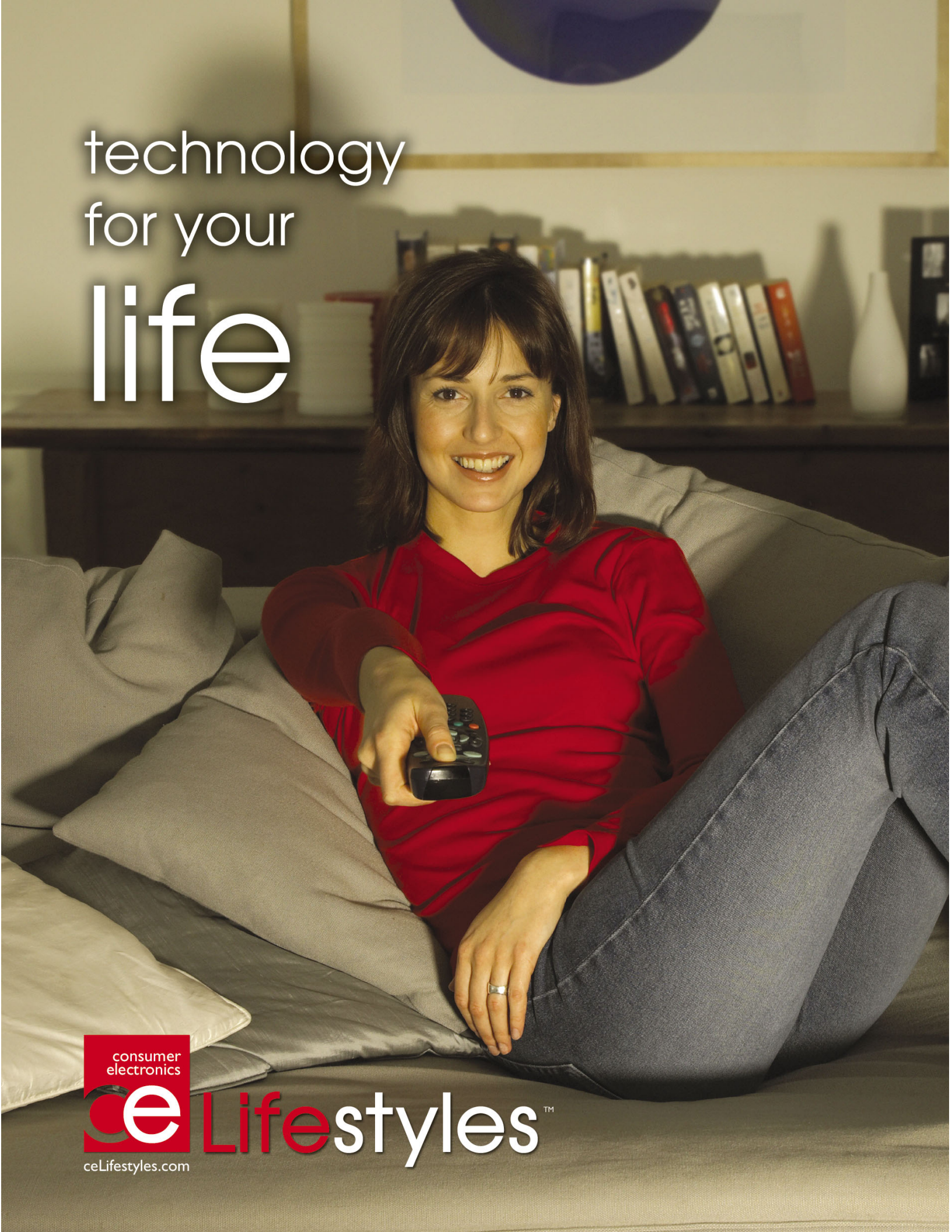
### 4 Read Reviews

Even with clearly marked labels that specify if a CD is inappropriate for a certain age group, some music gets into the hands of 'tweens and teens that you may not want them to hear. Communicate your standards for music clearly with your kids, ask them what music they are buying from stores or online, and occasionally listen to some of their song choices from the computer playlist. Read online reviews, and if you find questionable material for the age of your child, explain why that song is inappropriate and make sure they understand that you expect them to abide by your rules.

### 5 Play Along

Most young children love to dance. And if yours don't, you probably know someone else's kids who do. It takes just one moment to light up a room when children hit the dance floor, and their experience gets even better when they have others to dance with. When the music begins and the little ones start to move to the beat, don't just clap along; jump up from your chair and join the fun. Not only will you get to let out a little pent up energy and find yourself feeling happier by the second, but the kids will also be overjoyed to see you laughing and playing along with them.

BY JENNIFER SUGGITT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for your
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consumer
electronics
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ceLifestyles.com

Samsung SCH-i730 ($799.99) & the D307 ($299); www.samsung.com

# Hot Product Designs For 2006

## A Marriage Of Form & Function

Sleek digital cameras that fight for wallet space. Flashy, colorful cell phones that ring and sing according to your every mood. MP3 players that not only play and store songs but also double as voice recorders and, even better, as cell phones. We'll be seeing a lot of distinctive designs and product combos in 2006. We rounded up the experts to find out what'll work until next Christmas and what'll be out before the New Year's celebrations are over.

You asked for thin, and companies are delivering. Products designed in 2006 are going to be sleek and rectangular, with more rounded edges. Not only does this contemporary design give products a smooth, sophisticated finish, but it's also functionally sound, reducing the risk of chipped corners when dropped or bumped. And a rectangular shape is usually more ergonomically sound.

Companies are looking to combine features and functions into smaller footprints. "We've already seen this trend in cell phone design, and with the latest iPod nano," says Albert Oh, president of Memina (www.memina.com). "This not only reflects a growing sense of hip personal style, but also enhances portability. Consumers seem to be more inclined to stow devices in their pockets—rather than holstered like a cowboy with an arsenal of products, from cell phones and PDAs to MP3 players and USB drives, clasped around their belts."

Samsung demonstrates this trend with its new cell phones. The SGH-D207 ($299; www.samsung.com), for instance, has softly rounded corners. The glossy black and white finish makes it appear even slimmer.

Experts agree that manufacturers should make functionality a central focus even in the smallest and flashiest devices. (Women overwhelmingly look for functionality when buying CE products; see "Pretty & Practical In 2006" on page 34 for more info.)

## Fashion Forward

As consumer electronics devices become an integral part of everyday life, they'll be required to project more personal style. And that means more women-focused designs, as well.

Nokia sets the perfect example with its L'Amour Collection, which boasts the 7380, 7370, and 7360 (prices pending at press time), featuring natural materials and a fusion of colors and patterns. The nature-inspired graphics, the velvet-lined pouches, the overall design of the phones—are geared toward an individual who is conscious of both style and function.

Another product that's making strides in its effort to appeal to consumers' fashion sense is Microsoft's new Xbox 360 (Core System $299.99; www.microsoft.com). Aiming to loosen up the home entertainment crowd and add life to video game consoles, the Xbox 360 is a simple rectangle shape with changeable faceplates you may customize to suit your tastes and your home's decor. It's also a media powerhouse, with a 300MHz ATI graphics processor and three-core CPU, making the Xbox 360 the embodiment of form and function.

> We're excited that almost everything CE-related will look great this year.

## Product Combos

Convergence is key in 2006. The blending of two or more functions into one product to combine features and benefits reduces the number of devices you'll need to carry around in your purse or pocket. An example of this is the iTunes-enabled Motorola ROKR ($149.99; www.motorola.com), which combines a cell phone and MP3 player into one attractve device.

"Ultimately, with new functions being constantly applied to mobile communications devices, you may be able to reduce the number of products you carry with you," says Jeffrey Higashi, from the Samsung Design lab in Los Angeles. "In the past, if you took a trip and wanted to listen to music, capture pictures, stay in touch with email, and have access to a phone, you would have to carry four devices. Now there are devices that can handle all four tasks in one small product." He says that the only challenge is to optimize the experience of using multifunction devices so users don't have to sacrifice the simplicity that single-function devices offer.

## Lovin' The Look

Regardless of what products are designed in what way, we're excited that almost everything CE-related will look great this year. Better yet, with the huge improvements in technology in the past decade, they'll likely be incredibly functional, as well. In 2006, we *can* have it all.

BY MRIDU KHULLAR

# Technology & Style Become One

## Integrate CE Devices Into Your Home's Design

With sleek, stylish designs, home electronics never looked so good. As manufacturers bundle functions into more compact devices, blending TVs and home-theater systems with our home décor is getting easier.

Gone are the clunky faux-finish console TVs of yore that stood out regardless of how many doilies covered them. Integrating your stylish new plasma display or home-theater system into your living room may take only minor design changes, such as moving a curio cabinet, so you can mount the TV on the wall.

When considering your options, be consistent with the look of your electronic devices and the room's color scheme

Pixel Plus 2HD TV with Ambilight Technology; $2,999.99; www.philipsusa.com

(black, silver, wood, etc.) and its overall theme (contemporary, rustic, traditional, futuristic, etc.).

## Placement Is Everything

The days of hiding a TV in a wardrobe-sized entertainment center are gone. TVs today are meant to be displayed as pieces of art. To find the perfect spot for your TV, put yourself in the setting. Relax in your favorite easy chair and imagine movie night in your family room. Look for the best viewing angles and note where the windows are located and where you might place stereo speakers.

Mounting a flat-panel TV on the wall creates a focal point and provides a sense of balance. You'll need to drill holes in your walls, though, and it's easier to reposition a framed painting than your wall-mounted TV, so plan before you drill. Keep in mind that you will need to drill into wall studs, so the TV remains securely fastened to the wall.

Using a floor stand for your TV conveys a modern and contemporary look and allows more placement flexibility. You'll be able to reposition your TV more easily if you decide to rearrange. You can also display your TV in an open entertainment center. This is a practical choice because the center can house an entire home-theater system and store all your media. Also, depending on the center's size, many manufacturers provide additional shelving, so you can display family photos to tie in the room's design elements.

A room's design should support the acoustics and the visual experience that your electronic equipment delivers. Large, overstuffed chairs are comfortable, but they absorb sound produced by your A/V equipment, and chrome and wooden chairs deflect sound, making a room sound like an echo chamber. Even different types of window treatments can affect the sound and visuals in your family room. For example, heavy drapes prevent the sun from creating a glare on a CRT (cathode-ray tube) TV, but they'll absorb sound from your home-theater system.

Rearranging your living room changes your room's appearance, but it can cause a few headaches, too. Before you dive into the project, it may be helpful to map the room. We like Crystal AudioVideo's practical online room designer (www.crystalaudiovideo.com/mmtool/mmtool.asp), which is a free interactive tool that helps you arrange your home theater system.

DLO HomeDock • $99.99 • www.dlo.com

First, enter a room's dimensions. Next, choose from 10 furniture icons (couches, chairs, end tables, etc.) to position your furniture. Use your mouse to drag the icons into the room. Enter your home-theater system applications and preferences using the drop-down menus. Select the type of speakers you have or are considering and position them in the room. An icon turns red to indicate poor placement. When you're done creating your virtual room, you can print your design to help set up your new living room.

## Casually Display CE

Although there's nothing subtle about a five-piece home theater system, including the 42-inch wall-mounted plasma TV, there are tricks to displaying smaller-sized electronic devices (especially your iPod accessories that are too hot to hide).

Accessories such as the DLO HomeDock ($99.99; www.dlo.com) help incorporate your iPod into your home's design. DLO's HomeDock consists of a small platform that sports a black and silver finish; it's small enough to stow under a cabinet, but stylish enough to display 24/7. We

## Make It Blend

Mix contemporary devices with classic homes.

- Crystal Acoustics recently debuted its SmArt System 8 Home Theater System ($2,299; www.crystalaudiovideo.com). The speakers feature interchangeable side panels. Choose from dark cherry, maple, silver, or black, so you can make sure your speakers won't clash with your new accent wall and refinished wood floors.
- Mount your flat-panel TV on the wall above the fireplace or stand it on a mantle. A fireplace is often the focal point of a room, and with a sleek plasma or LCD TV to complement it, you can create an inspired centerpiece. Some fireplaces (especially wood-burning ones) emit more heat than others, which reduces the life of your TV. Because it requires drilling and because excess heat can harm your TV, ask a professional installer if the fireplace mantle is a good place for your TV.
- Look for small, bookshelf speakers that let you hear every bullet of "Saving Private Ryan." We especially like the 161 Speaker System from Bose ($142.20 a pair; www.bose.com).
- If you're building a house, prewire the walls for speakers, even if you're not ready to invest in the A/V gear.

were impressed that such a small device could do so much: Connect your iPod to your home-theater system and listen to your favorite tunes through your stereo; connect to your TV to enjoy slideshows using the iPod photo; and charge and sync your iPod with your PC or Mac via an included USB cable. This small device's unobtrusive design lets you display your iPod in a stylish, convenient way.

Instead of warm mugs of mulled cider and scented candles, remotes for the DVD player, stereo, TV, satellite receiver, and gaming console clutter our coffee tables. With the Philips RC9800i WiFi Touch Screen Remote Control ($599.99; www.philipsusa.com), use a new or existing Wi-Fi network to program five remotes in one touchscreen device for line-of-sight control of your electronics. Subtly manage your media with a few clicks and save on a few batteries, as well.

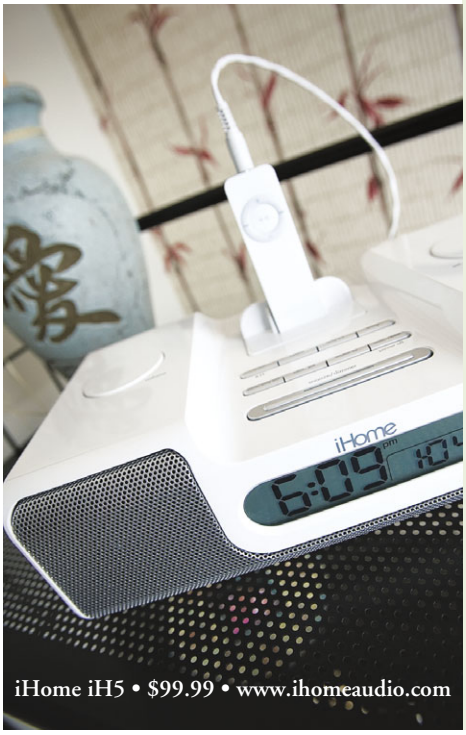
Sometimes you have to splurge by adding a unique touch that enhances your level of comfort. A Philips flat-panel TV that features ambient light technology is one device that could boost your family room's design and comfort level. Philips' 42-inch Pixel Plus 2HD TV with Ambilight Technology ($2,999.99; www.philipsusa.com) projects soft light onto the wall behind the TV based on the picture's content. You'll have a more relaxed viewing experience with greater picture detail, and the constant lighting and color adjustments soothe your eyes when you darken your home theater.

Another way to make a statement is with the Sony Wireless Platinum DVD Dream System DAV-LF1 ($1,999.99; www.sony.com). This stunning home-theater system integrates into your home with its sleek silver finish and slim rear speakers. The DAV-LFI includes a DVD/CD player and 600 watts of total system power. Best of all, by transmitting audio signal with infrared, the Dream System eliminates the clutter of numerous visible wires (making vacuuming easier!).

## Reflect Your Style

CE and style don't have to be at odds in your home. Tailor your home's decor to your lifestyle and to accommodate ever-evolving electronic devices. Let your taste be your inspiration and your arrangement and design show your character. With a little imagination and ingenuity, you can incorporate new electronics into your world. CE

BY LINNÉ OURADA



iHome iH5 • $99.99 • www.ihomeaudio.com

## Integrate CE Room By Room

Consumer electronics are making their way beyond your family room. Consider some of these ideas for virtually every room in your home.

**Bedroom.** Consider bringing in a space-saving TV, such as a 17-inch LCD accompanied by corner or shelf speakers. If you easily fall asleep in such a relaxing environment, no worries—you can wake up to your iPod with the iHome iH5 clock radio ($99.99; www.ihomeaudio.com), which sports a white finish and a clean, contemporary design to complement the look of your iPod.

**Kitchen.** Give your kitchen a fresh look with these key ingredients: the 7-inch Under-The-Cabinet LCD TV with DVD Player FDM-0700A from Polaroid ($229.99; www.polaroidelectronics.com) and the Philips Senseo Coffee Machine ($69.99; www.senseo.com). By having a DVD/CD combo in your kitchen, you can listen to your favorite CDs while you prepare dinner and watch your favorite TV shows while you tidy up afterward. The Polaroid FDM-0700A has a sleek silver finish and an LCD screen that swivels 180 degrees and folds flat for easy storage. It also sports a built-in clock with a convenient cooking timer. To match your coffee maker to your other kitchen accessories, the Philips' Senseo Coffee Machine comes in three colors (raven black, polar white, and blue). This unique coffee maker has a one-touch system and can make one or two cups of coffee in 30 seconds, letting you brew your morning cup of Joe in a delightfully trendy way.

**Bathroom.** Many of us aren't best friends with the bathroom scale. If you have to have one, consider investing in one that monitors more aspects of your health than just your weight, such as the BC 533 InnerScan Body Composition Monitor from Tanita ($119.95; www.tanita.com). Plus, it's so good-looking that you'll want to display it instead of hiding it in your linen closet. ●

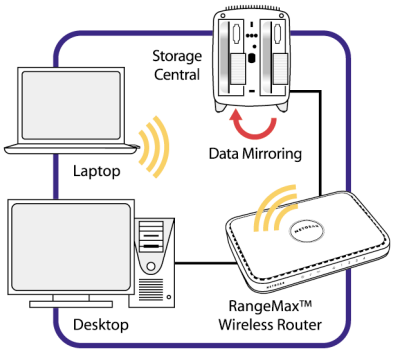
# Central Storage For Your Home Network

## Protect and share your digital life with NETGEAR's Storage Central

The new NETGEAR® Storage Central (SC101) is the storage device of choice for PC users seeking a fail-safe, expandable, and easily shared storage solution at an affordable price. With thousands of important personal or business documents, photos, music, and videos moving to digital format, Storage Central has emerged as the centrally accessible, fully protected, must-have solution for the digitally inclined. Storage Central is a breeze to set up with the SmartWizard™ Storage Manager and is compatible with virtually every wireless/wired router or switch on the market. Sharing is made easy because all your networked PCs are allowed access to large volumes of valuable digital content with the simplicity of your C: drive. With two IDE ports, expandability is never an issue - just slide in any standard IDE storage drive of any capacity and start backing up all of your files - in real time.* Safely synchronize, duplicate, and protect all your digital data with confidence in one compact, affordable, convenient location, and start enjoying NETGEAR-quality peace of mind. For more information, visit **www.netgear.com/go/SC**

### Storage Central SC101

- ***Fail-Safe:*** *Protect, mirror, and synchronize files automatically***
- ***Shared:*** *Store and share photos, videos, music, games, documents*
- ***Accessible:*** *Files a cessed by all PCs on network as a simple letter drive*
- ***Easy:*** *Fast and easy set up with SmartWizard™ Storage Manager*
- ***Expandable:*** *Upgrade storage with one or two IDE drives of any capacity*




Fail-safe mirroring and file synchronization. Up to two disks with multiple drives may be shared or kept private. Connect wired or wirelessly anywhere on the network.

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Staples — that was easy.™

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*Select any capacity IDE disks, sold separately.
**Advanced backup software from SmartSync is included.

NETGEAR®
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www.netgear.com

# Pretty & Practical In The New Year

## Enhance Your Life With Things That Work Well & Look Good

History shows us that beautiful and useful don't often reside in the same house. The Trojan Horse? Utilitarian, but what an eyesore (or so we guess). The Mona Lisa? Exquisitely serene, but she doesn't do Windows. We're drawn to things that beautify our world, but life demands we get things done, too. So when we find a product that's both pretty and practical, we just can't keep it to ourselves.

The following items, released in late 2005, stand out for their unique blending of function and form.

## A Natty Notebook

Sony just won't leave a good thing alone—and we're glad for that. Its new FJ series in the popular VAIO notebook line ($1,499.99 and up; www.sony.com/fj) is available in stunning colors: onyx black, sky blue, raspberry red, jade green, and pearl white.

Beyond its good looks, you'll enjoy the VAIO's full-size keyboard and its 14.1-inch screen wrapped up in a 5.3-pound package. It's also loaded with 100GB of storage, Windows XP, a Web camera, and microphone.

## Hello, Moto

Motorola made big news last year when, together with Apple, it introduced the aptly named ROKR, an iTunes-enabled cell phone with Cingular service ($249.99; www.motorola.com).

However, if you don't care for music capabilities on your cell phone, you might like the new Motorola PEBL U6 ($299; T-Mobile is the exclusive service provider at press time). This small work of art has a unique oval shape and a sleek metallic finish, and its dual hinge lets you effortlessly open and close it. With the PEBL, you can snap pictures, capture videos, send text messages, and get no-click access to news and other premium content.

Sony just won't leave a good thing alone—and we're glad for that.

## Shoot & Share

Kodak broke new ground with its release of the EasyShare-one ($599; www.kodak.com), the first Wi-Fi digital consumer camera. Instead of downloading your photos to your PC or notebook and sharing them that way, you can send photos with personal messages right from the camera at wireless hotspots, including the more than 6,200 T-Mobile hotspots in the United States and free access spots in places such as libraries and coffee shops. You also can store as many as 1,500 photos on the camera.

The new Sony Cyber-shot DSC-N1 ($499.95) may have less storage space (500 images), but its compact size and generous 3-inch LCD more than make up for that. This 8MP model stores images in VGA resolution, and you can create a slide show with music for viewing on the ample display. With the optional Memory Stick PRO Duo media card, you also can shoot videos.

## Video To Go

It was only a matter of time before it arrived, particularly after months of speculation and rumors—a video version of the iPod. The new Apple iPod ($299 and up; www.apple.com/ipod) comes in 30GB and 60GB models. The larger one is capable of holding 15,000 songs,

## Accessories

If you think Apple gives you lots of choices with its iPods, check out the available accessories. With the iPod universal dock ($39; store.apple.com) and Apple remote ($29), you can integrate your iPod into your home entertainment system. Or, dress up your iPod nano with a colorful armband or tube ($29).

BlackBerry sells a sport holster ($18.99; www.shopblackberry.com) in blue and black, silver and black, and yellow and black. For a dressier look, you can choose a leather clip holster ($26.99) in black, burgundy, and camel.

Don't forget, too, that you can spruce up your computer with relatively little expense by acquiring the right add-ons.

Logitech's new MX610 laser cordless mouse ($59.99; www.logitech.com) sends and receives information from the computer. By illuminating a button, the mouse can inform you when you receive an important instant message or email.

Panasonic puts a new spin on "Masterpiece Theater" with its custom frames that can transform select 42- and 50-inch plasma TVs into pieces of art. The frames come in black, pewter, walnut, gold, mahogany, and antique white finishes ($399.95 and up; www.panasonicdirect.com). ●

Kodak EasyShare-one
$599
www.kodak.com

25,000 photos, and 150 hours of video, which you view on a 2.5-inch display. Use it to watch video podcasts and TV shows or listen to audiobooks. With optional accessories, the iPod can suit many of your entertainment needs at home and on the go. (See the "Accessories" sidebar for more information.)

For slightly less money you can buy similar functionality in iriver's attractive new U10 multimedia players ($199.99 and up; www.iriveramerica.com). Both the 1GB and 512MB versions let you view photos, listen to music, watch videos, play games, and access subscription services.

## Clutter-Free TV

When you watch TV, you likely want to see crisp images on the screen, not a jungle of cords and dust-collecting boxes surrounding it. Enter the new 45-inch AQUOS LCD TVs from Sharp ($6,499.99; www.sharpusa.com). Both models, the LC-45GD7U and the LC-45GD5U, are high-definition, cable-ready sets that don't require a set-top box. The GD7U has a titanium finish with detachable bottom speakers, and the GD5U has a piano-black sheen and detachable side speakers.

## Wall-To-Wall Sound

As you ponder putting together a home theater or entertainment room, consider the usefulness and decorating possibilities of the SoundFrame SF-104 wall-mountable speakers from Innovox Audio ($219 and up per speaker; www.innovoxaudio.com). Each speaker weighs just 4 pounds and is only 11 inches long, and they're available in black, white, and many custom colors. (Customization fees apply.)

## A New Resolution

This New Year, as you're mulling over your CE purchases, resolve to be patient enough to buy just the right product. Keep repeating the "affordable, attractive, and practical" mantra, and you won't be disappointed.

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## Renaissance *Brands*

Like your little black dress, you can always count on some brands of consumer electronics for quality and good looks.

### Sony
**www.sonystyle.com**

Sony has a long history of providing consumers stylish and sporty products. The VAIO FJ notebooks, Walkman Bean MP3 players, and DCR-DVD403 Handycam camcorder are the latest examples.

### Bose
**www.bose.com**

Elegant and powerful, Bose Wave music systems must be heard to be believed. But in keeping up with the times, Bose also offers the SoundDock digital music system for your iPod.

### Philips
**www.consumer.philips.com**

We like the Ambilight soft lighting technology available on Philips flat TVs, and we're also drawn to the European styling of its SENSEO coffee machines.

# Lutron®: personalized one-touch dimming for your entire home.

**Integrate all your lighting into one-touch keypads that are as personalized as your home with a HomeWorks® total lighting control system.**

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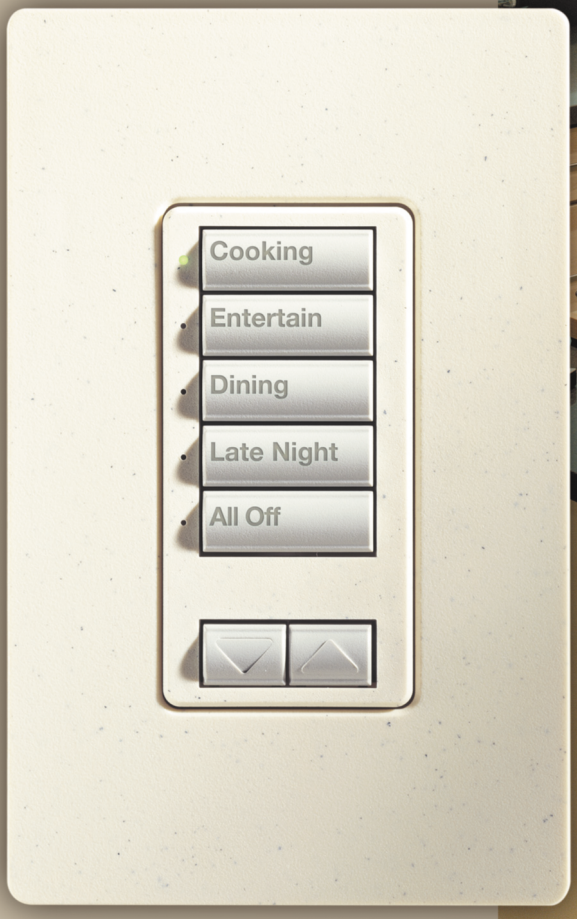


Actual size:
Custom engraved seeTouch® wall control in Satin Colors™ stone.

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# True Colors

## Do Women Really Think CE Are Prettier In Pink?

There is an old story among ad executives that when Gillette first wanted to sell its razors to women, it simply colored them pink. Many consumer electronics manufacturers are still taking this same approach. Want to get more women to buy your portable computers? Just color them pink. But do women really want a pink laptop, an orange camera, or a lime green PDA? Vendors may be surprised to discover that for most women, the answer is, "Not really."

Sony Vaio
$1,500 • www.sonystyle.com

As hard as it may be for manufacturers to swallow, American women just aren't that interested in how their gadgets look. In a recent study conducted by the CEA (Consumer Electronics Association; www.ce.org), only 5% of women ranked style/design as the most important feature when purchasing a CE product, whereas 51% listed functionality as the most important factor. Durability, ease-of-use, battery life, and price are much more important to the typical woman than the color of her device. Because women spend $50 billion and buy half of all electronic goods sold in the United States annually, vendors might see more green if they spent less time making pink.

## What Women Want

Just as James Carville famously tacked up a sign saying "the economy, stupid" at campaign headquarters during Bill Clinton's first successful bid for the presidency, CE manufacturers would do well to tack "functionality, stupid" on the walls of their product managers' offices.

Perhaps the best example of a company that gets it is digital photography market-leader Kodak (www.kodak.com). From the outset, company founder George Eastman realized that women were its target market. Roughly three-quarters of all camera purchasers and users are women—and have been since way back in the day when we actually shot pictures to film.

"The key brand women preferred much, much more than men did is Kodak," says Charles LeCompte, president of Lyra Research (www.lyra.com) in Boston, Mass. His firm published a study in November 2004 that showed dramatic differences in gender preferences when it comes to digital photography.

"Kodak is the number one brand for women in the U.S.," says LeCompte, "but it's only fourth for men. This was a big surprise to us, but when we talked to Kodak, we found it's been the company's strategy all along. It came from way behind in the digital camera market and was slow to develop an attractive product, but in the last few years, Kodak has focused its marketing and design on women, and now the company's the number one brand overall for any gender in the United States, and it's because it targeted women."

As Kodak transitioned itself from film into the world of digital photography, instead of selling pretty cameras, Kodak focused on selling easy-to-use cameras —the EasyShare line—with the precise features it learned women wanted: long battery life and easy printing and sharing.

"We have found that color does not drive the purchase of a camera," says Nancy Carr, VP of Marketing at Kodak. "The female consumer is pragmatic, results-driven, busy—she has no time to do a lot of things. We follow her and listen, and what we've learned is not, 'where are my colors?,' but, 'where are my pictures?'"

Because dramatically more women choose Kodak cameras every year than any of its competitors, it's hard to argue with Kodak's approach.

Currently, there is one Kodak camera, the V530 ($349), that comes in pink and red, but sales of the more neutral colors (silver and black) far outstrip the sales of the colorful ones. There is only one thing that consistently compels women to buy colored CE products: breast cancer. The color pink has been so effectively connected with this cause that almost any product—from tote bags to toasters—can move off the shelves if a portion of the proceeds benefits the fight against breast cancer.

"We found that the pink one is being used in breast cancer awareness promotions," says Carr. "But the silver and black are still the main purchases."

## Fashion Nation

What seems to be clear is that, aside from the proactive power of pink, most women distinguish between two very different kinds of CE purchases: fashion and function. With fashion purchases, how a woman looks and feels when she is using or carrying or looking at her device matters as much as how it works; with function purchases, almost nothing matters as much as what the device can do and how easily it can do it.

"The reason why Kodak has been so successful," says Carr, "is because we're not focused on fashion. We're focused on [a woman's] basic consumer insights. She

## The Diva's In The Details

Marti Barletta, author of "Marketing to Women: How to Understand, Reach, and Increase Your Share of the World's Largest Market Segment," believes that men and women approach purchasing decisions from opposite points of view. Men, she says, find a product that meets the top few things on their list of criteria and then they buy it. Women, however, tend to make a longer list of criteria, and they will go to great lengths to find a product that meets *all* of them. Color may be the least important factor, but it can be the deciding factor—the way a woman might choose between two mobile phones with identical features, for instance. "To coin a phrase," writes Barlatta, "the diva's in the details." ●

wants it now. She wants more choices than just 4- x 6-inch prints. She wants something stylish that fits her lifestyle and enhances her life—then you can worry about fashion. It's ease-of-use and style. Color is not considered style; color is considered fashion."

This subtle difference between style and fashion is something some manufacturers have not yet grasped. A pretty product isn't always an attractive product to women—and in some cases, it's a detriment. The number of women earning $100,000 or more has tripled in the last 10 years (according to the Employment Policy Foundation). These powerful women are not likely to enter a board room with a powder blue laptop in their hands. However, when fashion (including interior design) is the priority, women will shop with more of an eye toward color.

Sony (www.sonystyle.com) is among the CE vendors who successfully targets women with its CE products. It chooses carefully which products come in adventurous colors and which products remain more traditional.

Kodak V550 • $399.95
www.kodak.com

Its Walkman products, for instance, come in a rainbow of colors, but the new Bravia LCD television comes only in white, black, and silver.

Before releasing Bravia, which it is billing as "The World's First Television for Men and Women," Sony carefully researched women's preferences.

"Amid recent purchasers of a flat-panel TV, women report that elements related to style and design are amongst the most important in guiding their decisions," says Christopher Fawcett, Sony Electronics Corporate Marketing Director. "We have more female-targeted media on our ad plan than ever before. The product was designed to fit better into a room's décor and has a sleeker design than TVs from the past; for example, the speakers have been moved from the sides of the TV to the bottom to be more unobtrusive."

This strategy has brought Sony success: four weeks after its launch, Bravia, held the No. 1 position (in dollars) in the American LCD TV market.

Working women, ages 24 to 54—45.5 million of them at last count—are shaping up to be a more powerful CE demographic than any other group. This is mostly because, in addition to bringing home larger salaries than they historically have (according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women's median income has climbed 72% in the last 30 years), women also make more than 80% of household buying decisions (from Boston Consulting Group and TrendSight.com).

Perhaps it is a sign of the times that Gillette is now using *technology* to draw women to its newest razor—a battery-powered shaver that not only comes in pink but also in blue. While the necessity of a vibrating razor is debatable, it's clear that CE manufacturers who want a piece of the very lucrative female-buying-power pie will have to do better than just add burgundy and blush to their product lines; they'll have to build products that women actually want to use. ce

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

## True Blue

It's no accident that each season certain colors become popular—in everything from CE devices to shoes—but then, by the next season, somehow they seem incredibly passé. Pantone (www.pantone.com), the New Jersey-based company responsible for standardizing the chemical formulas for the colors we see everywhere from miniskirts to magazine ads, has become famous for its ability to predict which colors will be hot (or cool) each season. What can we expect for Spring 2006? Blue, blue, and more blue, tempered by Lily Green, fresh Viola, juicy Melon, French Vanilla, and Cameo Pink. ●

# Multitasking At Its Best

## The digital media software that does it all!

**Announcing Nero 7 Ultra Edition** – The Ultimate Audio, Video, Photo, Data and TV Solution which meets all of your digital media needs, now enables you to easily take control of your home entertainment experience.

Whether you want to create audio playlists of your MP3s or entertaining slide-shows of your photos, edit your home videos, burn a backup of your DVDs*, convert your audio & video into state-of-the-art MPEG-4 (Nero Digital™) files, share your content on your consumer electronic devices or manage your media files with a click of your remote control, Nero 7 Ultra Edition is truly the only partner you need for today's digital home.

**www.nero.com**

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BEST BUY Thousands of Possibilities GET YOURS · circuit city · COMPUSA WHERE AMERICA BUYS TECHNOLOGY · Fry's ELECTRONICS · Office DEPOT · amazon.com

* Does not copy DVD with copy protection

# Editor's Top 10

## Reasons I Love These Devices

What better way to ring in the New Year than with 2006's hottest accessories? And we don't mean the new Louis Vuitton clutch or a turquoise cashmere shrug. Here's why *CE Lifestyles* editor Katie Sommer loves the increased focus on style and design in 2006's consumer electronics devices.

**1** You're more likely to use something that is good-looking, so having a stylish digital camera to show off means 2006's photo album will be brimming with memories.

**2** A device that is designed well can benefit your overall well-being. For instance, an ergonomic (but attractive) cell phone such as Motorola's PEBL (www.motorola.com) is very easy on your hand.

**3** You can have that flat-panel TV and still have room for everything in your living room—just mount the TV on you wall, and you may even have more room than you did with your old CRT.

**4** A small, good-looking, and light MP3 player can be worn as a stylish accessory on a beaded lanyard around your neck.

Juicy Couture MP3 Necklace • $65
www.neimanmarcus.com

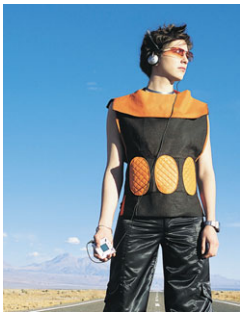
**5** Many A/V products in 2006 are designed so well that they become a lovely addition, instead of an eyesore, to your home's décor.

**6** Three words: Coach iPod case.

Multi-Stripe iPod Mini Case • $78
www.coach.com

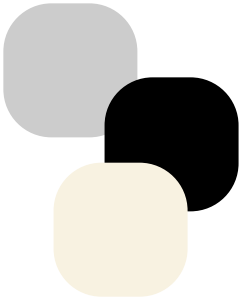
**7** Laptop totes are again the "it" accessory of 2006. (I adore Acme Made's [www.acmemade.com] new line.)

**8** It's really interesting to see how the seemingly opposite fashion and electronics industries are intersecting.



**9** Design doesn't have to be trendy. When something is well-designed, it's often a solid investment that you will use and enjoy for years to come.

**10** The color palette of 2006 is easy on the pastels and heavy on classic colors, such as silver, black, red, and champagne.



# Tips

## Integrate Your CE Devices Seamlessly

BY THEANO NIKITAS

### Wireless Sets You Free

With so many wireless devices on the market, it's time to break free of the ties (and cables) that tether you and your electronics to a single space in your house. You don't have to replace all your devices at once, but when you're ready for a new printer or laptop, make sure they have wireless capabilities. There are also new cameras from Canon, Kodak, and Nikon that are wireless, and if setting up surround sound means tripping over wires, look into wireless speakers, as well.

### Consider The Charge

When you need to charge your CE device, you always have more options than the one that came with your product—you can invest in something smaller and faster, as well as something that you can use on an airplane or in your car. But with multiple chargers not only do you have to keep track of where they are, but you also have to match up all those generic-looking chargers with the right devices. Although there's no single charger that will work with every gadget on the market, iGo's universal chargers (from $25; www.igo.com) come close, so see if there's an accessory tip (adapter) for all your mobile devices in your tote (or your dreams).

### Privacy, Please

If your laptop is an essential part of your carry-on luggage, you've probably experienced the prying-eye phenomenon that occurs on a regular basis in the close quarters of an airplane. You might not mind if you're reading the latest issue of *CE Lifestyles*, but if you're working on sensitive or proprietary material on your notebook, this could be a problem. If you know you're going to be working on sensitive material, request a window seat to get a little more privacy or angle the laptop to make it difficult for others to look over your shoulder. If that doesn't work for you, you can always add privacy accessories such as a Sun Shade ($35; www.hoodmanusa.com) that fits around the LCD or a 3M Computer Filter ($85; www.3M.com) that slides over the screen, blocking the view for everyone but you.

### Dress It Down

As much as you might want to show off your new toy—whether it's the latest iPod nano or the hottest digital camera—you may want to tone it down when you're out and about, lest you attract attention from less-than-savory types. For example, replace your iPod ear buds with a third-party headset that doesn't scream iPod (and may, in fact, be more comfortable and deliver better sound). Camera bags should be subtle, as well. Don't get one with a camera manufacturer's name on it; choose a bag that's less likely to alert potential bag-snatchers that there's an expensive camera inside. And when you put the bag down—even for a minute—always keep it between your feet (even in the loo).

### Music To Go

If you like to break the boredom of jogging or working out at the gym with some funky music, make sure your MP3's headphones or earbuds won't dislodge with vigorous activity. Also make sure that the lanyard is short enough (or can be tucked away), so it won't get tangled up in workout equipment. You can keep those pesky lanyards in check and protect your MP3 player with an armband such as Tune Belt's MP3 Armband Carrier ($13; www.tunebelt.com) or Body Glove's portable MP3 case ($35; www.fellowes.com).

# Shopping Advice

## Be Confident When Buying Digital Cameras & Camcorders

We make dozens of decisions every day: what to eat for lunch, which activities are appropriate for our kids, if we should ask (for the fifth time) our husbands to do the dishes this evening, etc. We don't want our lives to get any more complicated just because we would like to buy a new digital camera or camcorder.

But with the numerous models on the market today, it's hard to know how to begin narrowing down the choices. Check out this shopping guide for a look at digital camera and camcorder features you'll want to explore when shopping; knowing exactly what to look for just might make this decision a little easier.

### Size It Up

Before you shop decide what purpose your camera will serve. Point-and-shoot models are good for someone who wants a fairly small camera to take along to everyday events such as her son's soccer game or her daughter's birthday party. SLR (single-lens reflex) cameras are larger and are designed for more serious photographers.

No matter what kind of camera you prefer, go to an electronics store before

you buy (even if you buy online) and hold various styles and sizes of cameras. Some point-and-shoot digital cameras, such as the 5MP Kodak EasyShare V530 ($349.95; www.kodak.com), are similar in size to a credit card and are around a 1/2-inch thick, which can be difficult for someone with large or long fingers to hold securely, and bigger SLRs could feel cumbersome to a woman with small hands. The perfect specifications won't do much good if you almost drop the camera each time you hold it up to snap a shot.

Manufacturers are also making small camcorders that are much easier to hold with one hand than were the older, bulkier models. If you plan on walking around with the video camera instead of mounting it on a tripod, you will want a camcorder that weighs only a couple pounds and fits comfortably in your hand (and perhaps your tote). Also, make sure you can reach all the controls without having to jostle the camcorder as you record video.

## Examine The Details

Every digital camera and camcorder has specifications that help you create a beautiful end product. Think about the following features, so you can enter the store with a general idea of what you are looking and not feel overwhelmed by the possibilities.

**Megapixels.** If you're planning to enlarge your digital pictures to any size greater than 4- x 6-inch prints, you'll want a camera with at least 4MP. A 4 or 5MP digital camera produces excellent printed pictures, especially up to 8 x 10 prints, and a camera with 6, 7, or even 8MP will give you shots with extremely crisp details, even when you enlarge them to poster-sized prints. (See "Heading Overseas" on page 48 to read *CE Lifestyles'* Editor Katie Sommer's firsthand experience using the 7.1MP EX-Z750 Casio digital camera in Paris.)

**Shooting modes.** Both digital cameras and camcorders include special shooting modes that are designed to produce quality pictures or video in not-so-camera-friendly settings, such as on the beach. In this case you can use the Beach shooting mode to help the camera adjust to the light reflecting off the water. If you aren't knowledgeable about manually adjusting the settings in a scenario such as this, look for a device that has easily accessible shooting modes to help you capture the perfect picture in any situation.

**Zoom.** An optical zoom of 3X on a digital camera is sufficient for most point-and-shoot scenarios. Most digital camcorders have at least a 10X optical zoom, which should work well for general video recording, but you can find many models with 12X or 20X optical zoom.

## SHOPPING CHECKLIST

### Type Of Camera

- ❍ Point-and-shoot
- ❍ Digital SLR

### Type Of Camcorder

- ❍ MiniDV
- ❍ MICROMV
- ❍ Digital8
- ❍ DVD

### Ease Of Use

- ❍ Easy to hold
- ❍ Comfortable grip when taking pictures or shooting video
- ❍ Accessible controls you can reach without jostling

### Storage Media

- ❍ Internal memory
- ❍ Memory card
- ❍ SD (Secure Digital)
- ❍ CF (CompactFlash)
- ❍ Memory Stick
- ❍ MMC (MultiMediaCard)
- ❍ xD-Picture card
- ❍ Video recording media
- ❍ Video cassette
- ❍ DVD

### Megapixels

- ❍ 3MP
- ❍ 4MP
- ❍ 5MP
- ❍ 6MP
- ❍ 7MP
- ❍ 8MP

### Optical Zoom

- ❍ At least 3X for digital camera
- ❍ At least 10X for digital camcorder

### The Extras

**Camera**

- ❍ In-camera crop for digital stills
- ❍ In-camera red-eye removal
- ❍ Easy-to-use menus
- ❍ Easily accessible shooting modes
- ❍ Takes still photos while recording video
- ❍ Crisp, easy-to-see picture on LCD
- ❍ Manual controls (for white balance, focus, etc.)

**Camcorder**

- ❍ Easy-to-use menus
- ❍ Easily accessible shooting modes
- ❍ Takes still photos while recording video
- ❍ Crisp, easy-to-see picture on LCD
- ❍ Manual controls (for white balance, focus, etc.)

### Notes

Kodak EasyShare V530 • $349.95 • www.kodak.com

Remember that optical zoom is much more important than digital zoom. Optical zoom uses the camera's lens to physically zoom in on the subject; digital zoom causes the camera to digitally make the subject appear closer, which causes images to look pixelated. Ask a sales associate if you can experiment with the camera or camcorder in the store to see if the model's optical zoom is acceptable.

**Storage media.** Some cameras include internal memory (usually 16 or 32MB) that lets you store a dozen or so pictures without a memory card. (The amount of shots you can store depends on how many megapixels the camera has; the higher the megapixels, the more storage space each picture will need.)

The last thing you want to do is feel as though you have to delete photos when you're on vacation. If the camera has 5MP or more, buy at least a 256MB memory card. Plan to spend at least $25 (prices vary depending on the brand and format) for a 256MB card and more if you get a higher capacity card such as 512MB or 1GB.

Digital camcorders come in several formats, including MiniDV, Digital8, MICROMV, and DVD. The first three types record video to a cassette, and DVD camcorders record to DVDs. When shopping for a camcorder, figure the expense of cassettes or DVDs into the cost of your purchase so you stay within your budget. (Prices vary depending on media type and how many come in a package.)

**The extras.** After finding several models that have the main specifications you want (such as a 5MP digital camera with 3X optical zoom and an SD [Secure Digital] memory card slot) and are comfortable to use, examine the details of each to help you make your final decision. Check out The Extras in our "Shopping Checklist" sidebar for some features that vary among models and that might clinch a certain device for you.

## Let The Fun Begin

Now that we've introduced you to some of the main features you should explore when shopping for a digital camera or camcorder, you are ready to research and buy. Ask sales associates enough questions, so you feel comfortable with your options, and read online reviews of your top choices to develop the most well-rounded opinions before you make a final decision.

BY JENNIFER SUGGITT

## Save A Few Bucks

Check out these shopping tips to help you shave a few dollars off your total cost when shopping for a new digital camera or camcorder.

If you plan to use your digital camera for everyday occasions, such as birthdays or parties, and you don't plan to print the photos larger than 4 x 6 inches, you won't need a camera with 5MP or more. You can likely find a 3 or 4MP model for less money but still get high-quality 4- x 6- inch photos.

Sales associates are paid to sell. Before going to the store, decide what features you want (how many megapixels, etc.) and stick to those choices, so you aren't tempted to buy a high-end model or accessories you don't need.

If you already have a 256MB memory card (at minimum) from an older digital camera, consider limiting your choices for a new camera to models that use the same kind of card.

If you own a film camera or an older digital camera that you won't use after you make your purchase, use the old camera's carrying case instead of buying a new one.

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# Heading Overseas

## What Camera Is Best To Take Along?

Last fall, my husband and I planned a first anniversary trip to France, and I wanted to make sure we had the best camera to take with us to document the entire thing. But, even though I work around CE products every day, I was a bit overwhelmed by all the things I had to consider before deciding on one of them. I thought that if I was this overwhelmed, there are probably a lot of other people who would be, too, and what better place to share my experiences and research than in *CE Lifestyles*?

### My Legwork—What I Considered

Deciding on a camera to take to Europe was a surprisingly difficult decision for me, not only because there were so many great choices out there, but also because not all of them could be safely used overseas. I considered three main things when I was deciding: power supply, quality, and size.

**Power.** In America, most of our appliances operate at 110 volts and 60 Hertz; in Europe most appliances operate at 220 to 240 volts and at a frequency of 50 Hertz. Thus, Americans traveling to Europe need to use special plug adaptors and converters to modify their appliances to a country's standard. You can buy these either in stores or online; I used the International Voltage Converter & Adaptor Kit ($19.99; www.target.com).

We've had to deal with the electrical differences for decades, but only recently has it become necessary to consider it relative to photography. Because most cameras now are digital, consumers have to use electricity in one way or another to charge them. Without the proper converters and adaptors when you travel to Europe, you risk ruining your camera's dock with the wrong voltage. If your camera has a dock, you need to be absolutely positive that you'll be able to safely use it in Europe.

Even if your digital camera doesn't come with a dock, you still have to charge or change the batteries. You can buy a bunch of disposable batteries before you go or when you get to Europe. You could also invest in a charger and rechargeable batteries. I especially love the Rayovac PS 5 ($24.99; www.rayovac.com) and PS 6 ($49.99) 15-minute chargers, which can handle both AA and AAA batteries. However, if you do decide to invest in a charger, make sure its universal voltage (the two Rayovac systems I mentioned above are), so you can safely use it to charge your batteries in your hotel room.

**Quality.** I thought it would be a no-brainer when deciding on the quality

Taken in Natural Green mode.

Taken in Candlelight mode.

level of the camera I would take to Europe. I should choose one with high megapixels, an excellent lens, and lots of features, right? Not necessarily. In general, the higher the quality of the camera, the more expensive it will be, and I really struggled with the idea of taking a camera worth hundreds and hundreds of dollars to a major metropolitan area like Paris, where I would risk losing it or having it stolen or damaged. There are a lot of well-seasoned travelers who will tell you to invest in an under-$200 digicam and take that instead of the nicer one you use at home. However, more megapixels generally mean that you can make large prints, and I also knew I wanted to enlarge and frame our favorite shots when I got home. Make sure you consider this issue carefully before you take any of your CE gear overseas.

**Size.** The final major consideration for me was the size of the camera. We've all seen the teeny-tiny cameras that are so popular right now, and one would think that taking one of these minis on vacation would be better than lugging around a behemoth. I have small hands, so I really do love smaller cameras, but even I find them awkward to hold sometimes. On the other hand, size does matter when your camera will join your passport, wallet, various guidebooks, and cell phone in your purse, and your shoulder will thank you after a long day of exploring Versailles for bringing a lighter camera. When it comes to size, it's largely a matter of personal preference but consider this aspect of your camera carefully to make your experience as comfortable as possible.

## Now The Fun Part

Once I decided what I should look for in the camera, I chose a few to try before I left. I considered just about everything, but I narrowed it down to three models: the Kodak EasyShare V550 ($399.95; www.kodak.com), Canon PowerShot A620 ($449.99; www.canon.com), and the Casio Exilim EX-Z750 ($399.99; www.casio.com). Here's why.

**Kodak EasyShare V550.** I trust Kodak and knew that this model (the newest offering from Kodak at the time I was going to Europe) would be reliable. I also adore the black finish, and it's a little longer than others, which provided a good grip considering its small size. I checked with Kodak (interestingly, information on the universality of docks and batteries is not on most manufacturers' Web sites), and the dock that comes with this camera is indeed universal voltage. However, even though the dock is cool-looking, I was nervous about packing it in my luggage because the camera connector sticks up at the top—which might make it easy to damage in my suitcase.

At 5MP, the resolution was good enough to make large prints when I got home. And the V550 also has a great variety of scene modes, which is another important factor for me—I didn't want to have to waste time fumbling around with manual controls when I wanted to get the perfect shot of the Eiffel Tower at sunset. However, I thought it was awkward that the modes were accessible only from the top of the camera.

**Canon PowerShot A620.** I have to admit that this wasn't my first choice from Canon. I originally wanted the SD450, but Canon told me the dock wouldn't work with non-American outlets and recommended the 7.1MP A620 instead. It was actually a good recommendation because the A620 uses four AA batteries, so I would have a chance to consider a model without a dock. At 8.29 ounces (body only), it's the heaviest of the cameras, and it's also the largest. However, it has a side grip that made it

very comfortable to hold, so I was willing to overlook the extra bulk.

The Canon also has a nice variety of scene modes, but for me they weren't as intuitive as the Kodak's or easy to access as the Casio's. However, the A620 also has a great Stitch feature, which helps a user compose a panoramic shot, which I thought would be great for landscapes of the French countryside.

**Casio Exilim EX-Z750.** I've had my eye on this camera since it came out, so I was excited to request and evaluate a model. At 7.2MP, it has the highest resolution of the three, but it costs just as much as the Kodak V550, which has more than 2MP less, and $50 less than the Canon. I confirmed with Casio that its rechargeable Li-Ion battery and dock will work overseas with an adaptor.

The EX-Z750 is light—it's only 4.48 ounces without the battery, the lightest of the three. It's also the smallest and has a huge 2.5-inch LCD on the back. I have to admit that I was worried that it would be too small to hold and use comfortably or that one of my fingers would get in the way of the lens or flash. However, the scene modes were excellent, intuitive, and varied. (The Illustration and Pastel modes were especially cool.) Startup and shutdown were almost instantaneous, another big plus for me.

During an afternoon in the Tuileries Gardens, I experimented with the Casio's scene modes. Here are two ophotos taken of the same scene but with two different modes: The top was taken with Scenery mode, and the bottom was taken with Natural Green mode. The scene modes really do make a difference.

## The Big Decision

Choosing from these three was almost as hard as choosing which wine to drink during dinner in the Loire valley. Each one had its own pluses and minuses, and they're all excellent cameras,

## Happy Discoveries

With as much planning as I did, I didn't expect any surprises with the Casio Exilim, but I got two big ones, both good.

The first one was the video capabilities. I knew I would be able to shoot video, but I had no idea it would be of such good quality (640 x 480 pixels). It's much better than any other video I've seen from a digital still camera. The sound was excellent, which made sharing the movies a lot of fun when we got home. And there are many movie modes, so I could take video of the Eiffel Tower's twinkling lights at night just as easily as I could take video of the vineyards outside Amboise. Casio also bundles video-editing software with the package, so I can combine and edit the clips on my PC. I would not hesitate to use this camera instead of a camcorder on future vacations, provided I have enough memory.

The second nice surprise was the excellent battery life. I expected, because of the huge LCD, the 7.2MP resolution, and all the viewing and reviewing I did, to have to recharge the camera every night. However, it took about three days of almost-continuous use before I needed to recharge it, which is fantastic in situations like on vacation, where you're out of your routine or jet-lagged and might forget to dock it. ●

Taken in Twilight mode.

but in the end, I chose the Casio Exilim EX-Z750.

Why did I choose that model? It came down to two major things—the varied and intuitive scene modes and the 7.2MP resolution. I understand digital cameras, and I work with them every day, but I didn't want to have to mess with any manual settings or with confusing and hard-to-access scene modes. I also went to France with a mission—to bring back artwork for our home. What better prints to hang on our walls than ones I took myself on the vacation of a lifetime? And even though 5MP will usually be enough for substantial enlarging, I also wanted to be able to crop and zoom, so the extra-megapixel buffer was a huge plus to me.

One other important thing I needed to consider—memory cards. Because all those 7.2MP shots would take up a lot of memory, I needed something hefty. I got a 2GB Ultra II memory card from SanDisk ($239.99; www.sandisk.com) for my primary card and two 256MB SD cards ($39.99) as backups.

## Bon Voyage!

The Exilim was put to the real test as soon as we got to Paris. Over the course of our vacation, I took around 400 pictures—plenty for a good test ride.

**The all-important scene modes.** Testing the scene modes was an interesting process. For example, during an afternoon lounging in the Tuileries Gardens, I took two photos of the same scene, one using the Natural Green setting and the other using the Scenery setting. The Scenery setting photo looks much more true-to-life than the Natural Green setting, which (you guessed it) gave the foliage a green color, when it was really a mid-October calico of colors. However, when we visited the chateau of Chenonceau, and we walked toward the castle through a tunnel of incredibly (almost surreally) green trees, the Natural Green setting captured it perfectly.

I was also looking forward to testing out the Twilight and Nighttime modes. (What is more quintessentially Parisian than the Eiffel Tower at night?) The Twilight mode was fantastic and very easy to use. The Nighttime mode was more difficult, just because the shutter speed was so slow, but with the help of a makeshift tripod, I did get some shots that turned out really well. I also used the Candlelight mode in Notre Dame with excellent results. Overall, I was really ecstatic with how easy and intuitive the modes were.

## Merci Beaucoup, Casio

Did I make the right choice? You bet I did. It really was the perfect camera for me to take and use in France, and it left me saying only "ooh, la la!" and not "sacre bleu!" Even if it's not on your shortlist, use my considerations to develop your own set of guidelines to find the best digicam for your next overseas adventure. ce

BY KATIE SOMMER

## Back Home

Don't just stick your prints in a photo album—show them off! The Exilim keeps on giving, even when you get home.

**Share.** One of the best parts about vacationing is sharing your memories with family and friends when you get home. Unfortunately, that's kind of difficult with photos, especially if you have a large group—passing each picture often leaves the person on the end looking at Saint Chappelle when you're telling a story about Chaumont. However, the Exilim package includes an A/V cable that you can connect from your dock to your TV, so you can easily share your photos and video on the big screen.

**Prints.** There's no one hard-and-fast set of guidelines when it comes to print sizes, but in general, you can blow up 7.2MP prints to 11 x 14 inches. I kept my resolution set at the highest I could (3,072 x 2,304), so I could take advantage of all those megapixels. This also allows for some major zooming and cropping, as I did when I cropped several gargoyles from a photo of Notre Dame for a series of 4- x 6-inch prints. ●

# Preserve Your Memories

## Create A Digital Scrapbook

It's time to 'fess up: How many of you have boxes of pictures collecting dust in your basement? We sure do. We had the best intentions for those photos, too. We said, "Someday, we'll put them in a beautiful scrapbook!" Unfortunately, "someday" has been a long time coming. With the digital revolution, many of us have replaced the boxes with CDs full of pictures. Here again, though, these pictures seem only to attract dust instead of making it into a scrapbook. By using some of the CE devices you've come to love, and incorporating some scrapbooking software, you can easily and quickly create a scrapbook to show off your pictures.

There's plenty of software today made specifically for scrapbooking. Packages, such as Scrapbook Factory Deluxe 3.0 ($39.95; www.novadevelopment.com), come with plenty of layouts that let you drop in your pictures—with little to no scrapbooking experience required. Or, if you're a more advanced scrapbooker, make your own pages from scratch.

### Digital Benefits

Not only is digital scrapbooking fun, but also it's less expensive to create pages on your PC than it is with traditional paper-based scrapbooking. Excluding the cost of a computer (we're assuming you have one), all you'll need is the software. Some software packages and layouts are even free, though you may have to register with the site, as is the case if you want free layouts from Digital Scrapbook Place (free; www.digitalscrapbookplace.com). Or you may choose to use a design program that you already own, such as

Epson StoryTeller Photo Book Creator • starting at $19.99 • www.epson.com

Adobe PhotoShop CS2 ($599; www.adobe.com) or Microsoft Publisher 2003 ($169; www.microsoft.com).

Another reason digital scrapbooking is less expensive is because you are able to correct mistakes without wasting supplies. If you accidentally draw on the wrong page, click the Undo button a few times, and you're back to where you started. This also makes it less risky to experiment with new ideas.

Even better, you'll never run out of your favorite ivory lace paper on your family album page because you can reuse the same background as many times as you want. Plus, you're sure to be able to find everything you need in just the right color by customizing the color schemes of your papers and embellishments to fit your photos. In addition, depending on the effects your software includes, you can easily incorporate as many stickers, 3D objects, fun letters and fonts, and textures into your page, without any additional expense.

Once you've created a scrapbook on the computer, it's easy to share it with friends and family who live thousands of miles away. Some programs let you export your pages to a PDF (Portable Document Format) file for sending via email. Others will let you post your book to the Web. Either way, it's better than trying to scan a hardcopy page—especially if it's a 12- x 12-inch page—that won't fit in your scanner.

The final benefit to digital scrapbooking is the time factor. It's much quicker to drop pictures into a template, print, and place in your album than it is to cut and paste each little object into a traditional paper-based scrapbook.

## Print Your Pages

Even though we love the ability to store digital images on our PCs, it's still nice to have hard copies of some of our photos. Likewise, it's nice to have hard copies of the scrapbook pages you make. There are a few options available for printing your pages. If you already own a quality photo printer and are satisfied with the page sizes it prints, you're all set.

Or, if you'd prefer 12 x 12 scrapbook pages but can't print them from your existing printer, there are a couple options. The Epson Stylus Photo R1800 ($549; www.epson.com) is a high-resolution photo printer that handles paper up to 13 x 44 inches. That's impressive because most inkjet printers are limited to a width of 8.5 inches, but what's more impressive is that the R1800 can print borderless prints up to 13 inches wide.

## A Scrapbooker's Toolbox

In order to create a beautiful memory book, you'll need to have the right tools for the job. Here's a list of things you'll need to get started:

**DIGITAL PHOTOS** Make sure they are of high enough resolution to be printed at the size you intend to use them for.

**SCANNER** Get creative with your scanner. Try scanning pencils, erasers, and paperclips to create the perfect background for the page documenting your daughter's first day of school.

**PHOTO PAPER** Make sure it's acid-free and lignin-free so that your pictures are properly preserved.

**CDS** Back up all of the pictures you use in your scrapbook to CD. Then, make an envelope to store the CD in the back of your album, so everything stays neatly organized.

**SCISSORS** If you're planning on creating your own embellishments, you'll need some sharp scissors to make those precise cuts.

**SOFTWARE** Every digital scrapbooker will have her own preference when it comes to software. It doesn't matter which package you use as long as it is flexible enough to suit your creative desires.

**ALBUM** After taking time to snap pictures and place them in a scrapbook page, you'll want to show off your pages in a book that fits the theme of your pages. Look for white lace covered albums for wedding pictures, sports-themed books for kids pages, or go for a more versatile album that fits your living room décor and can accommodate a variety of page themes.

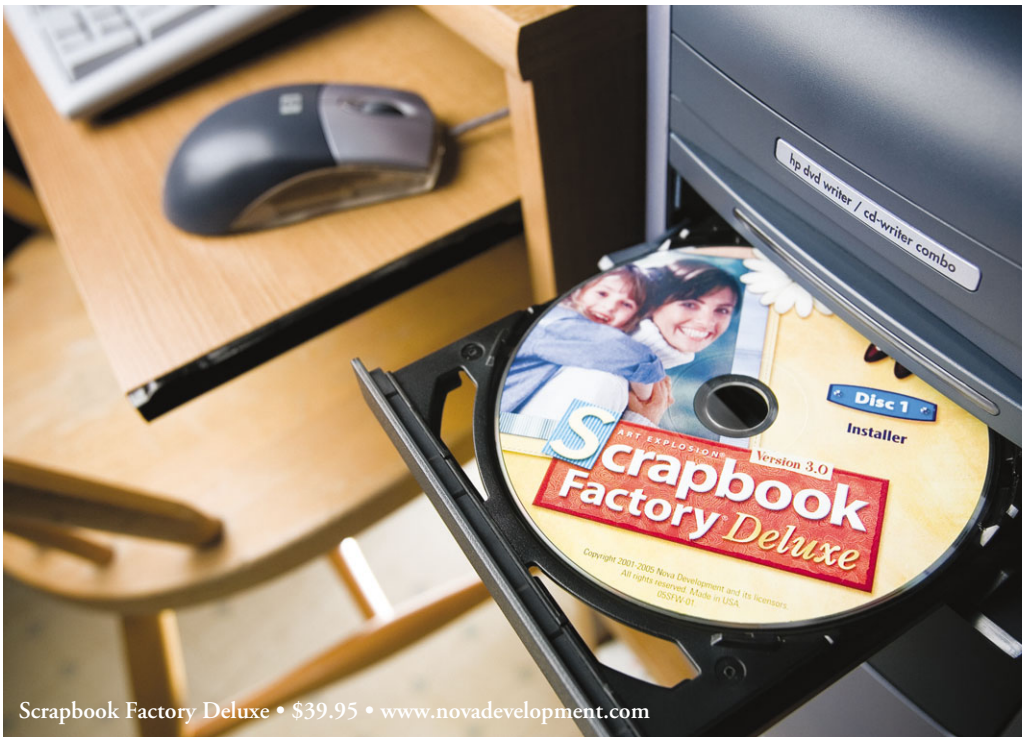
**PRINTER** You really don't want to scrimp when it comes to printing your pages. Either use a high-quality photo printer and photo paper to print your pages or take them to your local print shop.

If you're not quite willing to shell out the money for a new printer, take your pages to a print shop, such as CopyMax (inside of OfficeMax). Here, for instance, you can print a 12- x 12-inch page for less than $2. CopyMax doesn't stock 12- x 12-inch paper, so you'll have to bring your own. Doing so ensures the paper is both acid and lignin free and of the weight and brightness you want. Another alternative is to use a Web-based printing service, such as Shiny Nickels (shinynickels.com), which offers 12 x 12 prints for $2 per page plus shipping.

## Get Creative

With the right supplies and technology and a little creativity, you're sure to create pages of memories. If you can't find the perfect background for a page, make your own using a scanner. Food, craft, sports, and other household items make great backgrounds for scrapbooks. Although a sandwich and a glass of pop may not do much for your page, Cheerios, pencils, lace, baseballs, paperclips, etc. can make cool backgrounds—just like the papers you can buy in the store, but more customized to suit your pages because you are arranging the items. To scan Cheerios, for instance, cover the scanner with a thin, clear layer of plastic wrap (for protection) and then pour on the Cheerios. Once they're arranged as you like, scan and use as a background.

If you like the hands-on look and feel that can only be accomplished by cutting and pasting pictures and elements onto paper, digital scrapbooking is still an option: Use your PC, printer, and scanner to create backgrounds, embellishments, or catchy headings for your pages. As always, use acid-free and lignin-free paper and adhesive, so your pages will be properly preserved for the future. For glues go to a hobby store and look for a photo-safe adhesive in the scrapbooking section. You're sure to find many options, including tape. We especially like the Xyron Magic Sticker Maker ($14.99; www.xyron.com),



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which lets us take printouts of bouquets and rings and make them into stickers for our wedding pages. In addition, just because you created your page on the PC doesn't mean it can only incorporate digital items. Consider pasting ticket stubs, menus, and other items to your printed pages for an extra touch.

## Don't Forget

Now that you're all set with everything you need to start scrapbooking, don't forget to keep the snapshots coming. Carry your digital camera in your purse or car so that it's always with you whenever a great photo opportunity arises. Also, take advantage of the megapixels that your camera can capture. Even though higher-quality pictures consume more space on your camera's memory card, the ability to crop your photos to perfectly fit your scrapbook page is well worth the cost of an extra card.

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

## Take A Shortcut

For anyone who's still thinking she doesn't have enough time to make a cool scrapbook, consider using a kit, such as the Epson StoryTeller Photo Book Creator (starting at $19.99; www.epson.com), to put your pictures into a book that you'll be proud to display on your coffee table. Epson's StoryTeller Photo Book Creator comes with everything you'll need to create a perfect photo book: software, paper, a hard-cover book with adhesive pages, and a glossy printable cover. Simply drag and drop your pictures into the templates, enter captions, print, and place the pages in your book. It's that simple. The beautiful hard-cover book will make a great addition to your family room and guests will love to see pictures of all the fun times you had on your recent vacation.

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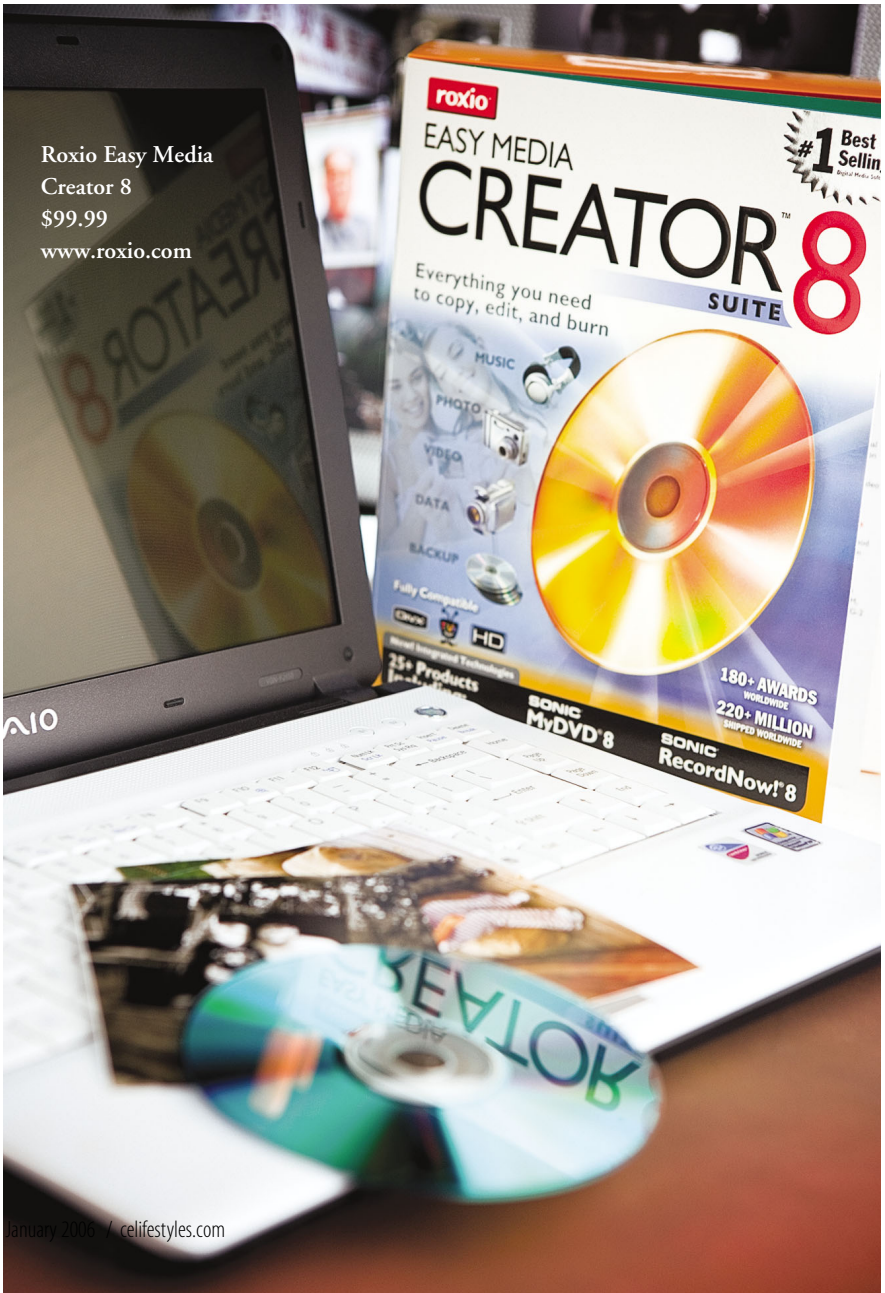
# Make A Slideshow For Your Next Celebration

## And Not Your Uncle's Slideshow, Either




Roxio Easy Media Creator 8
$99.99
www.roxio.com

Once upon a time, at the mere mention of the word "slideshow," you knew what to expect: a roaring projector fan, a noisy carousel, the occasional upside-down slide. And even if no one ran screaming from the room, someone probably wanted to. Sooner or later, we all reach our threshold when it comes to someone else's vacation.

But that's old school. Digital technology has given even the stodgy old slideshow an extreme makeover. Armed with nothing more than digital photos, a software program, and maybe a song or two, you can enhance a celebration or other event with a professional-looking slideshow packing a lot more entertainment value than your uncle's latest fishing trip.

### Get With The Program

Several programs are available that make it easy for you to create a slideshow from scratch. If it's for a very small gathering, you can play it on your computer, but more likely, you'll want to burn it to a recordable disc, so you can pop it into a DVD player and watch it on a TV or media projector. Here are a few options worth checking out.

**Roxio Easy Media Creator 8**
$99.99 • www.roxio.com

The latest version of this jam-packed application suite does slideshows better than ever. It walks you through the process in three main steps: selecting photos and audio, customizing each slide, and determining the show's output (video file, disc, etc.).

One feature we particularly like is its selection of 13 transition styles, some of which are event-specific: child's birthday, wedding album, and so on. Some supply background graphics, as well, and selecting a style loads a thumbnail of a sample slideshow, so you can instantly decide whether it's appropriate.

EMC also includes an audio recorder program, so if you can connect a microphone to your PC, you can record your own narration.

**Wondershare Software Photo2DVD Studio 4**
$49.95 • www.photo-to-dvd.com

If you'd prefer a dedicated slideshow program, this is one of the best. It has a lot of depth, with a whopping near-150 transition styles to choose from, and everything is highly configurable. But it has a gorgeous, well-designed interface that keeps it user-friendly.

You can download a trial version, and if you click the Products tab and then the Online Demo link under Product Info on the right side of the page, you can even watch an animated little movie showing the typical workflow.

**Dmagix Software ShowMaker 2**
$25 standard, $145 professional • www.dmagic.dk

This is another dedicated program. In addition to lots of creative control, you have some unique output options, with the ability to send slideshows by email, post them online, and distribute them with their own software viewer, so the slideshow arrives self-contained and ready to play . . . in Windows, at least. There are also two versions of program: one for home users and another for business applications.

A free 30-day demo version is available.

**Apple iPhoto 5**
$79 with iLife • www.apple.com

If you're on the Mac platform, this is the obvious choice. The program used to be free, but as it's evolved, it has become part of the iLife suite of media production programs, along with iDVD, iMovie HD, GarageBand, and the still-free iTunes.

In addition to almost every creative option you could want—more than a dozen transition styles, the ability to configure each slide's timing and panning, and more—there's also Apple's usual high level of integration. If you want a soundtrack, it's easy to pull in one or more tracks from your iTunes library; or, with GarageBand, you could even compose your own. When you're finished, you can export the production to iDVD and burn it to a disc.

## Tips For Creating Slideshows

No matter which program you use, start working with it early enough to give yourself time to learn its features. And keep these pointers in mind.

- A slideshow shouldn't look like an assortment of photos thrown randomly together. Determine ahead of time what you want your slideshow to accomplish narratively: tell a love story, relate a chronology of events, alternate humor with nostalgia, etc. Then approach every creative decision with that strategy in mind.
- Don't rush the tempo. Make sure your viewers have time to absorb each image before moving on, especially if it's going to make them laugh.
- Don't dawdle, either. You don't want people fidgeting in their seats. When you think you've finished your slideshow, run through it several times, so you can get a feel for its pace and spot anything that may need an adjustment. An unbiased opinion of a friend can be valuable here.
- Add text to photos only if there's a compelling reason for it, and even

## Top 10 Occasions For Slideshows

Almost any occasion can be a good excuse for a slideshow. But some events are milestones in people's lives and beg to be commemorated with a little extra effort. Even events that have sadness at their core: Sometimes, divorce is celebrated as a new beginning, and wakes are celebrations of a life well lived.

1. Child's first birthday
2. Any birthday with a zero
3. Graduation
4. Engagement
5. Wedding
6. Anniversary
7. Divorce
8. Dream vacation
9. Retirement
10. Wake

## Make It A Gift

A slideshow doesn't have to close after a one-night-only premier. Unless you plan on displaying it from the computer on which you created it, you'll probably burn it to a CD or DVD anyway. If it's in honor of a person or couple, then why not give them the disc when the show is over? And if its focus is a larger group—an office staff, an extended family—you could burn a copy for each person.

The main concern here is presentation. Instead of just handing over the disc in a paper sleeve, package it in a jewel case, with custom-made lid and tray inserts, or a similarly personalized DVD case.

If you're using Roxio's Easy Media Creator, one of its many tools is a Label Creator for creating CD and DVD case inserts, complete with graphics and text. Although the program includes ready-to-go templates, you can also import your own photos, and what better choice than one or more highlights from the slideshow itself? If you're on a Mac, Roxio's CD-burning software Toast Titanium 7 ($99.95) comes with its own label-making application, Discus RE.

In lieu of a specialized program, you could lay out your design in a basic photo editor or even Microsoft Word. For a CD jewel case, use the standard dimensions: 4.75 inches square for the lid insert, and for the back tray, 4.6 inches high x 5.9 inches wide.

Just be sure that you print your inserts on matte or glossy photo paper. They'll look infinitely slicker than if you use normal document paper.

If you feel like making a really high-end gift, consider giving not only the slideshow, but the means to watch it, as well: a digital frame. These are picture frames with built-in LCDs for displaying digital photos.

Some frames, such as Vialta's VistaFrame ($299.99; www.vialta.com), display photos and slideshows by storing them in internal memory or reading them off memory cards. Others, including Pacific Digital's MemoryFrame PV1 Personal Media Player ($179.99; www.pacificdigital.com), can handle audio files, as well.

For one-stop shopping and comparison, visit eFrameCentral.com (www.eframecentral.com), where you'll find several sizes and brands of frames and some steep discounts off the list price.

If you feel like making a **really high-end gift,** consider giving not only the slideshow, but the means to watch it, as well: **a digital frame.**

Pacific Digital MemoryFrame PV1 • $179.99 • www.pacificdigital.com

then, keep it short and to the point. Proofread for spelling, grammar, and punctuation. You don't want easily preventable goofs to detract from the show.

- Don't get overly gimmicky with transitions, which can become distracting and annoying. Most of the time, a simple dissolve is sufficient.

- If you're displaying photos on backgrounds or adding text to photos, never use dark-on-dark or light-on-light color schemes. It muddles visuals and makes text difficult to read. Instead, go for contrast, which improves visibility and vibrancy.

- If you're setting your slideshow to music, look for opportunities to match imagery to lyrics (or musical dynamics), so each complements the other for an emotional impact.

- When you do play your slideshow, pay attention to the lighting and overall mood of the location. If guests are busy chatting and mingling, don't show it until they are ready to settle down.

## It's Showtime

Just as Rome wasn't built in a day, a great slideshow won't come together in a single hour. Take your time and take advantage of whatever creative tools your program puts at your disposal. Remember, you're the director, and your slideshow can be funny, delightful, emotionally moving . . . whatever you want it to be.

BY BRIAN HODGE

# Best Songs For Slideshows

If you have an urge to put the audio in audiovisual, the right song can turn a good sideshow into a great one. Sometimes the choice of song is obvious, especially if the star of the show has channeled her inner Ally McBeal and adopted her own theme song. Then again, sometimes it's up to you to match the song with the occasion.

Obviously, our list is highly subjective, but if you don't find the right tune here, these should at least get you thinking, and that's what counts.

**Green Day,** "Good Riddance (Time Of Your Life)." When this bouncy acoustic number first came out, high school seniors across the country instantly adopted it as their theme song for dances. But with sentimental lyrics that speak of turning points and photographs, it's tailor-made for graduation, too.

**Tom Waits,** "I Don't Wanna Grow Up." Waits is one of those rare songwriters who other songwriters regard with universal awe. If anybody's penned a better tune for the birthday of your terminally adolescent friend, we haven't heard it.

**Olivia Newton-John,** "I Honestly Love You." Songs don't sound any more plaintively, heart-tuggingly sincere than this. Cue it up for a slideshow at an engagement party, and you're guaranteed to melt at least one attendee to quivering sobs.

**The Beatles,** "In My Life." The team of Lennon and McCartney produced a boatload of pop music's most enduring classics, and this warm tribute to the one loved above all others is perfect for a wedding.

**B.B. King,** "The Thrill Is Gone." As we said, some people celebrate divorces. Paired with the right photos of the absent ex—preferably the unflattering kind—this can have your audience crying tears of laughter.

**Willie Nelson,** "On The Road Again." You say you had some rollicking good times on your vacation, and you just can't wait to do it again? Willie understands.

**Johnny Paycheck,** "Take This Job And Shove It." OK, the sentiments may be a little crude, but this song has been around long enough to achieve the status of a cultural landmark, with an anthemic quality that's perfect for kicking off someone's retirement.

**Van Halen,** "Dance The Night Away." Sometimes the slideshow is better off coming together after the celebration. If you want to immortalize the night's highlights, this early hit hasn't lost one bit of its infectious fun.

# Know How

## One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

It's a big world out there, and sometimes a scene you want to shoot is too wide to fit into your lens all at once. You don't necessarily have to get everything in one shot, though. Instead, you can take multiple shots and then assemble them into a panorama, a composite photo with proportions similar to a movie screen or even wider.

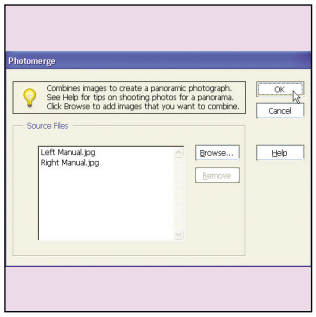
This requires some planning while shooting your pictures. Imagine the vista in front of you sectioned into panels; then shoot your photos with the edges of those panels overlapping by about one-third. Using a tripod will help keep things accurately aligned.

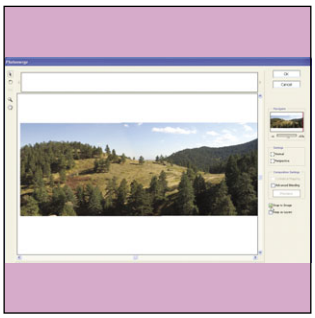
You can create a panorama with as many photos as you want, both horizontally and vertically. To keep our illustration simple, we'll use just two.

## Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

1

Open your photos in Standard Edit view. From the File menu, select New and then Photomerge Panorama. Click OK in the dialog box showing the names of your source files.



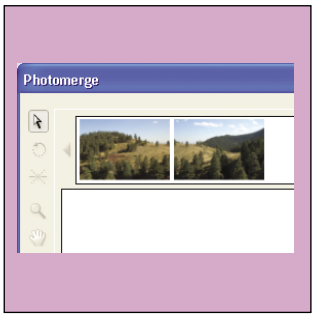



4

Drag the next photo down and drop it onto the previous one. As long as the Snap To Image box is checked, PSE will recognize the overlap in the photos and align them accordingly. It will also shift pixels to correct slight differences in perspective, so the images join perfectly.

2

This opens the Photomerge interface. You may find the panorama already assembled in the workspace, or you may simply find thumbnails of your source pictures in the box across the top.

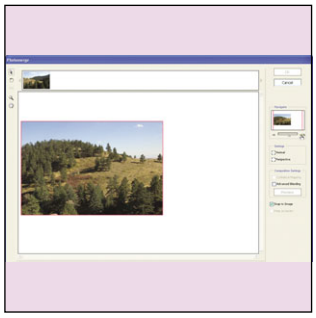


5

Click Advanced Blending to reduce possible color inconsistencies at the seam. Here, the sky marginally shifted tones between exposures.

3

If your photos are in the box, drag one down into the workspace. You can adjust its size using the Navigator controls on the right.

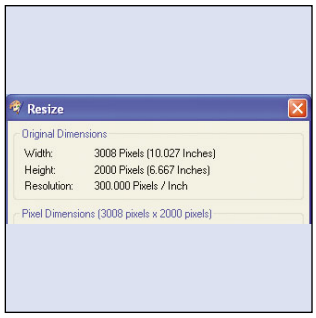


6

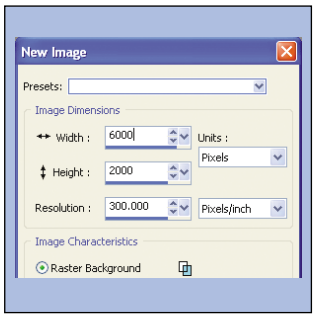
Now experiment with other controls. Changing Settings from Normal to Perspective gives you a wrap-around effect, with the image flaring at the end. Click Cylindrical Mapping to restore a rectangular look while retaining the perspective correction. When you're done, click OK.

## Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

Unfortunately, PSP doesn't have a dedicated panorama tool; you'll need to create the panorama from scratch. Open your photos and choose Resize under the Image menu to check their pixel dimensions; write down the dimensions, so you can use them for the next step.

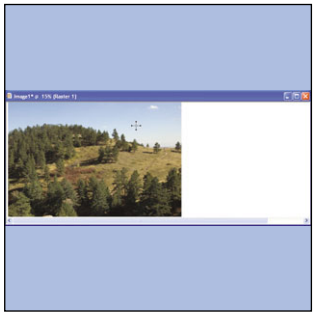


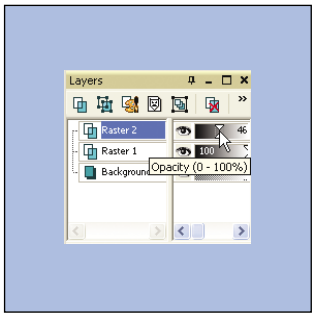

Click the File menu and create a New Image large enough to hold your pictures.




Copy the first picture and paste it on the new image as a New Layer.

Use the toolbar's Move tool to drag the photo to its proper location.

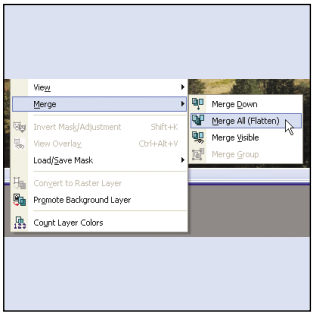





Copy the next picture and paste it in as a New Layer. In the Layers Palette (if you can't see the palette already, select the View menu, the Palettes submenu, and then Layers), drag the Opacity slider for the new layer back to roughly 50%, so you can see through the image to the first layer.

Use the Move tool to drag the new layer into alignment with the layer beneath. Because it's translucent, you'll be able to match up the overlapping features.

After the layer is in place, return its Opacity to 100%. Repeat steps 5 through 7 for any remaining photos you want to add.

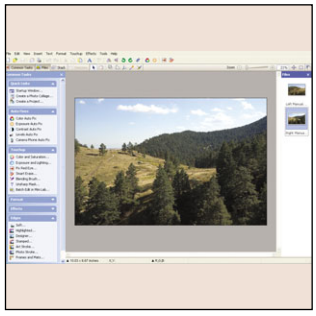



Click the Layers menu, open the Merge submenu, and select Merge All (Flatten). This will join the layers into one image. There's no blending to contend with color inconsistencies, so you may need to use the Clone Brush (see last month's "Know How" on page 62) to smooth the seams.

## Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

1

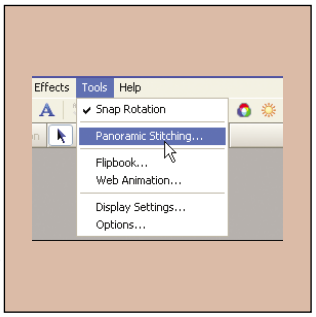
Open your photos in the workspace. If you click the Files button in the toolbar, the Files Palette will open, so you can be sure you have them all.

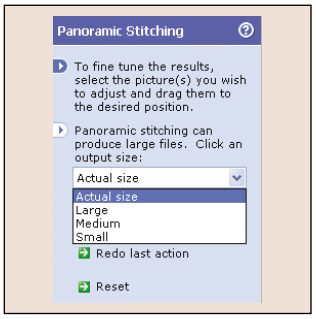


Your panorama appears in preview form. If the automated process has gotten any images out of order, you can drag them into their proper positions. You'll likely find it easier to fine-tune their location by using your arrow keys to move the selected photo.

2

From the Tools menu, select Panoramic Stitching.

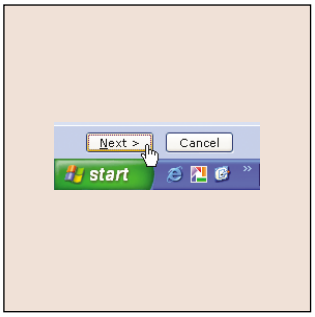



In the task pane, select the panorama's size: its actual size (default) or small, medium, or large.

3

Click the Next button at the bottom of the task pane.



Click Done. The program will finish combining the photos into a composite and send it to the regular workspace. Use the Crop tool to trim away the ragged edges left by the stitching process.

4

The program analyzes the images and automatically stitches them together.

# Speakers should be heard, not seen. That's why we put them in the screen.

Three speakers integrated into the frame, two surround sound speakers and a subwoofer complete the system.

## Introducing the Da-Lite Acoustical Imager

Designed for your decor and engineered for your senses. This revolutionary home theater system combines the clarity of a fixed Da-Lite screen with the harmony of a JBL 5.1 audio surround sound system. The Da-Lite Acoustical Imager is simple to set up. The left, right and center speakers are integrated into the screen's frame. The compact surround sound speakers bring up the rear while the subwoofer delivers the bass for a truly remarkable home theater experience. Choose between a Video or an HDTV screen. Available in eight projection surfaces. Or have Da-Lite custom build a screen for your home theater.

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# Digital Photo Project

## Wine Or Champagne Bag

Most of us look forward to either hosting or attending a New Year's Eve party, and the perfect accompaniment to all that merriment is a lovely glass of wine or champagne. Use a favorite photo from the past year to adorn a fabric bag, and then give a bottle of bubbly to your host or your guests for a truly memorable keepsake.

### Supplies:

- Fabric wine bag
- Digital file of a favorite photo
- Fabric photo transfer paper
- Iron
- Decorative accents, such as ribbon or thread

### Instructions:

Use your photo editor to resize your photo to fit onto your bag. To help get the proper measurements, print your photo on normal office paper, cut it out, and hold it against the bag to see if the dimensions will work.

Next, print the photo on fabric photo transfer paper and cut it out.

Use the iron to transfer the image on the paper to the bag. Because every brand of photo transfer paper is different, refer to your paper's instructions for exactly how to do this. However, it's smart to first iron a small area (perhaps a corner) of the bag to make sure the heat won't damage the fabric.

Then, use the accents to decorate the bag. We love the look of wide stitches in a contrasting color to frame the photo, but you can use beads, paint, ribbon, or whatever else you want.

Finally, give it! This bag makes a wonderful hostess gift when it's holding a bottle of wine or champagne. If you're the host and you have the time and the resources, create one for every couple attending your party, each with a different photo celebrating your friendship.

BY KATIE SOMMER

### Tips:

Use two different photos of the same dimensions to decorate both the front and the back of the bag.

Create a gift tag out of another photo; punch a hole in it, thread the drawstring through it, and then tie it in a bow to secure it.

Need a nonalcoholic idea? Fill the bag with individual packets of different types of tea, hot cocoa, or mulled cider; attach a cinnamon stick to the drawstring for a festive look.

# tips New Year's Photo Resolutions

## 1 Now & Then

Use your digicam to dig up a little history and learn about your hometown. First, head over to the town library or newspaper or ask older relatives or neighbors for photos that depict your hometown as it once was. The pictures might include shots of an old building, farm, or streets from years ago. Next, find whatever object or place that is in the picture and take digital photos of it in the present day. Then make a photo package to display your findings. This is a fun way to showcase past and present at a family reunion or a hometown Heritage Day. It might take some hard work, but the final project will be appreciated by many.

## 2 Weight Loss

When it comes to New Year's resolutions, weight loss is at the top of many of our lists. If you vowed to make weight loss a No. 1 priority this year, document your progress with photos of yourself as you reach goals throughout your weight-loss program. The photos will also serve as a great motivation tool to help you stick to your new healthy lifestyle. When you've reached your goal weight, treat yourself to a makeover and take one final photo of the new you.

## 3 Outdoor Project

Planning an outdoor project this year? Document it with your digital camera. Take pictures of your grandkids helping you plant trees; when they look at them 20 years from now, they will be proud to see that those giant evergreens in the backyard are the same evergreens they helped plant. Or, take photos of your garden throughout the season to notice the changes in the plants, flowers, and vegetables over time. You can also document the transformation of the exterior of a building by photographing a painting project. Whatever your outdoor project may be, collect the photos and turn them into a creative scrapbook to showcase your hard work.

## 4 Redecorate, Revamp, Remodel

Whether you are redecorating your entire kitchen or plan to remodel the entire house, don't forget to take lots of photos during the process. Once you have revamped your home's style, it may be hard to remember what it looked like before you started. Taking digital photos will help you record all the changes and later remember what your home looked like in years past. Plus, your sister who lives across the country won't believe her eyes when you email her the photos of your newly redecorated home.

## 5 Explore Your Interests

Start a creative long-term project to explore your passion of photography. Choose one subject that strikes your interest and practice taking pictures of it all year long. Ideas might include people, landscapes, clouds, cars, churches, windmills, etc. Practice photographing the subject using different camera settings, in different lighting, and at different angles. At the end of the year, gather all of the photos you have taken and turn them into a themed collage, a group of similar yet distinct framed photos for your wall, or a portfolio to display your creative work.

BY LINNÉ OURADA

# Gift Of The Month

## SportBrain iStep X1

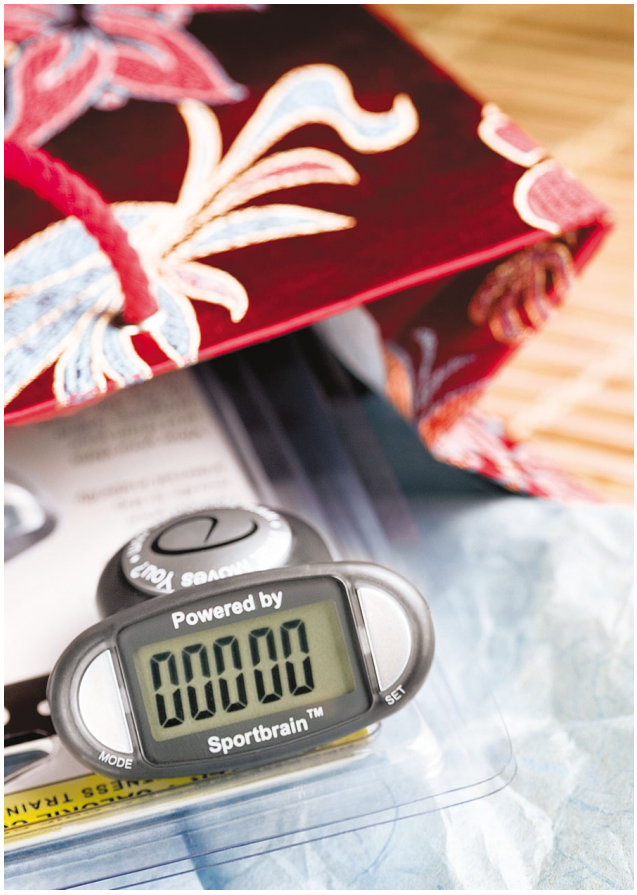
January has arrived, and with it comes 2006, the New Year, and a chance to start again. Although New Year's resolutions have become a bit cliché, the beginning of a new year is a good time to break old habits, or perhaps start some new ones.

Every month we feature a gift for less than $50 and tell you why we think someone on your shopping list would love it. If anyone you know has decided that 2006 is their year to begin a healthy lifestyle, then January's Gift Of The Month, the SportBrain iStep X1 pedometer ($39.95; www.sportbrain.com), would be perfect for them.

### Get Stepping

A lot has been said in recent months about the benefits of walking. As a general rule, walking 10,000 steps a day is a good way to begin the journey to a healthier you. But how in the world do you know how many steps you're walking? While you could buy your best girlfriend or sister a small notebook and pencil to help her record her steps, we think a better option (and certainly a more practical one) would be SportBrain's iStep X1 pedometer.

Although we realize you can buy a pedometer at just about any large discount store for less than $25, you really get what you pay for. Less expensive pedometers may count steps taken, distance traveled, and even calories burned, but the iStep X1 lets you upload the data to a computer via the included USB 1.1 cable, so you can chart your progress.




The iStep X1 is compatible with PCs running Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP, and the lucky recipient will need Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0 or newer, so if your friend is a Mac girl, she won't be able to take advantage of all the X1's features.

For those who love gadgets, the X1 pedometer is a great mix of practicality and technology. By downloading SportBrain iSync (www.sportbrain.com/register), you can upload the wealth of information recorded in your X1 and see it come to life in colorful Sportivity Charts on a personalized Web page. (Sportivity Charts show you hour-by-hour how many steps you've taken in a given day.) The site also has a Step/Calorie Display & Body Mass Index page that charts your daily steps, calories burned, miles walked, and more. With iSync, those numbers might actually start meaning something to you.

To make your gift even more meaningful, buy an X1 of your own and offer to take walks with the recipient. Then, not only do you have the satisfaction of finding the perfect gift for your friend or sister, but you can also start down the road of healthy living together. ce

BY JOY MARTIN

# Business at home never sounded so good.

The new iHome iH5™ makes your iPod® earbud free. So you can talk on the phone. Tackle paperwork. And hold meetings in your home office against a backdrop of incredibly rich, natural stereo sound from our iH5 Reson8™ speakers.

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# Sights & Sounds Of The Street

## The Cars Of 2006 Make Beautiful Music & Movies, Too

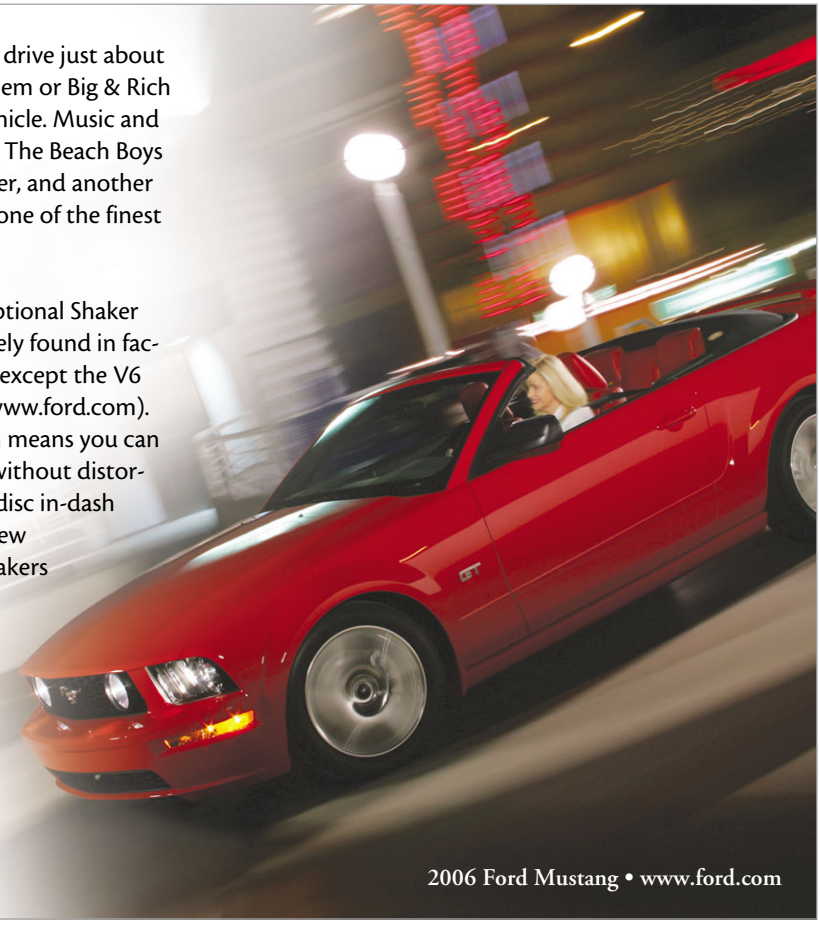
Car multimedia technology gives new meaning to the phrase "drive-in movie." For most of automotive history, a car's multimedia capabilities were limited to audio. After-market stereos and speakers have been around for many years, going back to the days of the 8-track tape and earlier. And before that, cars had radios. Video in cars and SUVs is a relatively new and exciting phenomenon, so long as you keep your eyes on the road. We'll take a look at some of our favorite 2006 cars that include excellent multimedia options straight from the factory and also list a few cool after-market products that you can have installed in your own car (for those of you not in the market for a new set of wheels). We'll start with the old standard, car audio.

### Audio

Everywhere we go, the kids wanna rock. You can drive just about any street in any town and hear the likes of Eminem or Big & Rich pounding from the speakers of a neighboring vehicle. Music and cars go together like Christmas and candy canes. The Beach Boys practically made a career of combining the former, and another product from the '60s, the Ford Mustang, offers one of the finest examples of car audio on the road today.

**2006 Ford Mustang.** The 2006 Ford Mustang's optional Shaker 1000 audio system is a 10-speaker symphony rarely found in factory vehicles and is available on all 2006 models, except the V6 Standard and Deluxe, for an additional $1,770 (www.ford.com). The system kicks out 1,000 watts of audio, which means you can listen to the Black-Eyed Peas as loud as you like without distortion. The Shaker 1000 system also includes a six-disc in-dash changer and two subwoofers in the trunk. The new Mustang's engine roars, but the Shaker 1000 speakers are more than loud enough to overcome this pony's thunderous gallop.

**Other models.** 2006 Mitsubishi Eclipse (Rockford Fosgate nine-speaker audio system, as part of the Sun & Sound package, $1,500; www.mitsubishicars.com); 2006 SAAB 9-3 Sport Sedan (13-speaker SAAB Infotainment system with a six-CD changer, standard on Aero Sport Sedan; www.saabusa.com).



2006 Ford Mustang • www.ford.com

## Satellite Radio

Satellite radio is a young technology that's made a big splash in the auto market. Nearly every car rolling off assembly lines for the 2006 model year supports either XM or Sirius satellite radio, and many cars support both. Satellite radio is superior to terrestrial radio in all but two ways: You can't get local stations, and you have to pay for it. On the positive side, satellite radio has commercial-free music and dozens of channels of music, news, and talk radio, and you won't hear any static. You can also find the same programming coast-to-coast, so no matter where you are, your favorite satellite radio stations will be at hand. Satellite radio is especially good for drivers who have long commutes to work or who spend a lot of time on the road for business trips.

**2006 Mini Cooper.** Few cars on the road seem to capture the hearts of women like the Mini Cooper (www.miniusa.com), something that's been true since the original Mini debuted in the '60s. The Mini can serenade women with an optional Harmon Kardon eight-speaker audio system ($550) and an optional Sirius satellite radio subscription. The Mini Cooper has a road-tripping pedigree as old as the Mini itself, so when you're ready to take off for points unknown on a long weekend, be sure you have your satellite radio tuned in.

**Other models.** Pontiac G6 6 Cylinder, GT, GTP (supports XM satellite radio, free three-month trial; www.pontiac.com). Nissan Xterra Off Road and SE (XM and Sirius satellite radio optional, $350 for satellite radio receiver; www.nissanusa.com).

## DVD/Video

The family road trip is a time-honored vacation tradition, but one that has often been marred by a chorus of "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" from the kids in the back seat. Many new minivans and SUVs now offer DVD entertainment systems to distract the young ones with their favorite movies, something parents nationwide will greatly appreciate.

**2006 Subaru B9 Tribeca Limited 7-Passenger.** The DVD system in this classy Subaru Tribeca (www.subaru.com) has a 9-inch screen with a pair of wireless headphones and an auxiliary input to which you can connect a game console such as an Xbox. The 160-watt system also includes a six-disc in-dash CD player with nine speakers, including a subwoofer. Your kids can now enjoy the latest "SpongeBob SquarePants" DVD while you peacefully trek across America, and you may just find yourself singing "On The Road Again" a little more often.

**Other models.** 2006 Dodge Grand Caravan SXT Special Edition Minivan (six-disc CD changer plus 7-inch LCD, two wireless headphones, auxiliary inputs; standard; www.dodge.com). 2006 GMC Envoy XL (7-inch LCD, two wireless headphones, auxiliary inputs; standard; www.gmc.com). 2006 Nissan Path-finder SE (7-inch screen, two wireless headphones, auxiliary inputs; optional $1,600; www.nissanusa.com).

2006 Subaru B9 Tribeca • www.subaru.com

# After-Market **Accessories**

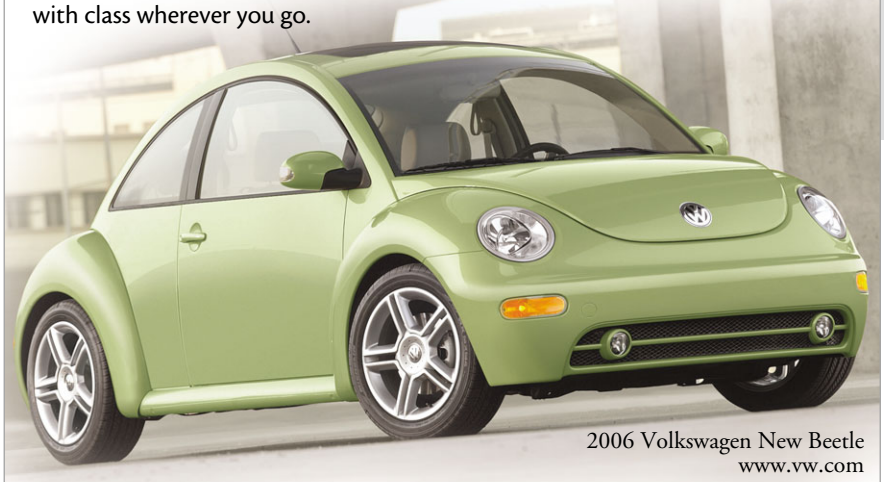
Most people wouldn't mind getting their hands on a new Mustang or Mini every year, but of course that's not practical, and many of us are happy with our current cars, thank you very much. But if you're not satisfied with your car's multimedia abilities, you can upgrade pretty easily. Here are some of our favorite car multimedia products.

- CD player/receiver: Kenwood KCD-MP928 ($529.99; www.kenwoodusa.com)
- Speakers: Infinity 9612i 6x9s ($139.95; www.infinitysystems.com)
- XM Radio: Pioneer AirWare (for XM Radio; $330; www.pioneerelectronics.com)
- Sirius Radio: Starmate Replay ST2 ($129.99; www.sirius.com)
- Overhead DVD player: Sony MV-900SDS Overhead DVD DreamSystem ($799.99; www.crutchfield.com)
- iPod Adapter: Monster iCruze ($149; www.monstercable.com)

## Portable Digital Audio

It's about time car manufacturers design car stereos that drivers can easily plug their portable audio players into. It's much more convenient to pack a few hundred (or thousand) of your favorite songs on your iPod than it is to carry around stacks of CDs. A handful of car manufacturers such as Scion and BMW offer optional iPod connection kits for their car stereos, and companies such as Honda, Nissan, and Audi will soon offer iPod kits, as well.

**2006 Volkswagen New Beetle.** The New Beetle (www.vw.com) is a good example of a car that embraces your portable audio habits. The car's stereo has an MP3 player connector that should work with just about any player and a specially designed shelf in the car's console into which you can place your player. Upgrade the car's sound to the Premium package, and you'll be rockin' with class wherever you go.



2006 Volkswagen New Beetle
www.vw.com

**Other models.** Volvo S60 (optional iPod adapter; www.volvocars.us). Scion tC (iPod adapter/MP3 player support; iPod requires upgrade to Pioneer CD player for $260; www.scion.com).

# The **Family Truckster**

If you're shopping for a family vehicle that offers the most multimedia, consider the 2006 Honda Odyssey Touring minivan (automobiles.honda.com). This Odyssey version has a seven-speaker, 360-watt audio system that includes a subwoofer and a six-disc, in-dash CD changer. The stereo receives XM satellite radio signals (with a subscription). The DVD rear entertainment system has a 9-inch LCD and two wireless headsets. With this many multimedia features, you may find yourself spending more time in the van than in your living room.

Many of us spend a lot of time in our cars, whether it's commuting to work, traveling for business or vacation, or taking a trip to visit friends and families. Long hours on the open road get old quickly, but a pocketful of good music and a handful of movies can make the trip much more enjoyable. Today's car makers know how much we enjoy our music and video and have improved the quality of their multimedia products in recent years. So enjoy the ride. It just got a lot better.

BY MICHAEL SWEET

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# CE Retailers

## Customer Satisfaction Means More Than Getting The Lowest Price

What images come to mind when you think of shopping at Best Buy or Circuit City? Probably not an intimate, quiet experience. But like so many others, you probably have gone to one of these stores looking for a bargain.

The problem with these popular stores is that their big, bright, booming-loud interiors are more of a guy thing than a girl thing. Generally, female customers approach a shopping excursion differently than men do, and that's no different when looking for the right CE products.

Given this reality, is there any place you can shop for home electronics that provides a more appealing atmosphere? Yes, particularly in regional stores. And we believe the success of these stores will drive bigger retailers to rethink how they can best appeal to the needs of their female customers.

Sony Style retail showroom.

## Show Me How It Works

Women are just as likely as men to initiate the purchase of a CE item for the home, according to CEA Market Research. That's why Ron Conlin, a partner with J. D. Power and Associates, says many retailers are "missing the boat" by not focusing more on their female customers. He notes that many female shoppers who are first-time buyers of CE products don't make their decision about which item to buy until they are in the store. Therefore, retailers must employ salespeople who are knowledgeable about the products they sell—an area in which Conlin thinks big companies such as Best Buy and Circuit City struggle.

Conversely, Conlin says, regional stores such as Tweeter (www.tweeter.com), which ranked first in customer satisfaction in the inaugural J. D. Power and Associates Electronics Retailer Satisfaction Study of customers, do exceptionally well in showing their female customers how a product will meet their needs. For instance, a Tweeter sales rep will demonstrate a digital camera's ease of use rather than talk about its technical specifications, Conlin says.

## Personalized Service

Big CE retail chains are beginning to realize they need to offer more personalized service to their customers. Last summer, Best Buy began to revamp some of its 700-plus stores in order to target specific demographics, such as home-theater enthusiasts and small business owners. This is part of the chain's new "customer-centric platform," which Best Buy planned to expand to as many as 300 of its stores by early 2006.

As part of this new business approach, Best Buy offers personal shopping assistants for female customers in certain stores, including those in Atlanta, Dallas, and New York.

On the other hand, some CE retailers already cater to female customers. Studio D (www.studiodnaperville.com) in Naperville, Ill., treats its customers like next-door neighbors. Customers have raved about the store's "neighborhood atmosphere" and comfortable ambiance.

In addition to its friendly, cozy appeal, Studio D is tapping into its customers' desire for hands-on help to get the most out of the items they own. Experienced staffers can show shoppers how a product works, and customers can try it in the store before they buy it. The store also rents some products to its clients and offers classes, workshops, and one-on-one consulting sessions.

With more than two dozen outlets scattered in 14 states, Sony Style (www.sonystyle.com) retail stores are designed to appeal to women, as well. Customers can try out CE products in "living

## Shopping Tips

1 Research the products you're interested in by reading *CE Lifestyles* and the Web sites of stores and manufacturers. Use this information to prepare questions about the products, write them down, and take them with you so you can take notes while talking with a sales associate.

2 Set your budget. Once you see and interact with items in a store, you may be tempted to upgrade to a product or system that's a bit out of your reach. Know your spending limit before you enter the store and stick to it.

3 Tell the staff how you intend to use your purchase. That will help the associate steer you to the right product.

4 Ask if the store will match competitors' prices or financing deals.

5 Find out what the return policy is. Can an item be returned once it's out of the box? Is there a restocking fee? How many days does the policy cover?

rooms" and other demo areas, receive personalized help at the concierge desk, and walk aisles wide enough to accommodate strollers.

## Elite Products

You can find good deals on moderately priced products, such as a digital camera or DVD player, at general retailers (see the "General Retailers" sidebar). But it's best to look elsewhere for assistance with putting together a home-theater system or to find limited-availability high-end products.

Some regional chains, such as Tweeter, are noted for their expertise in these areas. The Tweeter chain has more than 150 stores in 22 states, including HiFi Buys Amphitheatre and Sound Advice stores. One of the store's goals is to equip you with as much knowledge as possible about the products you're interested in before you shop. Thus, the Tweeter Web site's Research section is loaded with information on a wide range of the midrange to high-end products that the chain carries.

Ultimate Electronics (www.ultimateelectronics.com) is a Colorado-based chain with 32 stores in nine states, including the previously named SoundTrack shops. According to company President and COO Randy Baumberger, the chain does not sell any items through its Web site because the stores prefer to foster long-term relationships with customers by getting to know their needs in person and identifying products that will work best for them.

In a typical Ultimate Electronics store, you can visit demo rooms made to look like a home theater or immerse yourself in the soothing sounds of products in the dedicated listening areas. "Women tend to enjoy experiential shopping," Baumberger says. "They want to experience the nuances of technology."

Furthermore, Ultimate Electronics, which ranked second in customer service in the J. D. Power survey, installs the items it sells instead of outsourcing that to a third party. In fact, Baumberger says part of the installation process includes gathering family members around their new purchase in their home and demonstrating to everyone how it works.

Magnolia Audio Video (www.magnoliaav.com) stores and its Magnolia Home Theater cousin (located in Best Buy stores) cater to customers who want customized home theaters or view their CE products in light of the overall style of their homes. These stores sell big-ticket items from high-end brands including Pioneer Elite, MartinLogan, and Stewart Filmscreen and offer customers in-home consultations.

Next to the MAV store in Seattle is an MAV Design Center, one of the company's premier services. It takes the concept of personal service to another level, with beautiful showrooms, a wine bar, and appointment-only consultations.

## Give & Receive

Great products at reasonable prices aren't the only things women look for when they shop. We also like to know that we're supporting retailers who agree with us that it is better to give than to receive. For instance, Best Buy annually gives 1.5% of pretax earnings to charity. It has awarded millions of dollars to schools to beef up their technology tools and through its Children's Foundation gives scholarships to students across the country.

Customers of Studio D can enroll in a rewards program through which they can designate 1% of the net value of a purchase to one of several local programs and organizations.

The Tweeter Home Entertainment Group Charity Fund invests in the communities of its stores by funding chapters of the Make-A-Wish Foundation and children's hospitals.

And Wal-Mart, which targets 90% of its charitable giving to local communities, committed $17 million to the relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (see www.walmartfoundation.org).

Knowing your patronage supports such worthy causes is the best kind of customer satisfaction.

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## General Retailers

It should come as no surprise that the world's largest retailer, Wal-Mart, is now one of the leading sellers of CE items. Its shelves are stocked with DVRs, flat-panel TVs, and camcorders—not to mention shampoo, diapers, and cookware.

But Wal-Mart isn't the only general retailer that wants a piece of the $100 billion-plus that will be spent in 2006 on electronics. Target (www.target.com) and Kmart (www.kmart.com), for instance, have expanded their electronics departments in recent years to offer more products, including some bigger-ticket items, such as HDTVs, DVRs, and home-theater-in-a-box systems. All three companies sell hundreds of CE items through their Web stores, as well, including products that are available online exclusively.

Compared with special retailers such as Ultimate Electronics, general retailers don't always offer the range of products and brand names, especially for higher-end items. For example, at one point when we looked at Kmart.com, it listed just three products in its Home Theater section.

Still, as you wonder where all the hours in the day go, it's nice to know you can pick up a dinner from the deli, new Nikes for your son, and your daughter's birthday gift—that MP3 player she's dying to have—all in one place.

# tips Keep Your Home Clean

## 1 Let The Robot Pitch In

If you like the idea of cleaning your floors at the press of a button, try a Roomba vacuum cleaner ($149.99 and up; www.irobot.com). It doesn't do stairs, furniture, or vertical surfaces, but for routine cleaning, it does an excellent job on open floors—bare surfaces (such as tile or wood floors) especially. It uses technology developed for the U.S. military to ensure that it thoroughly covers the entire room, even around furniture. And for those tougher jobs, iRobot's Scooba ($399.99) washes floors.

## 2 Add An Air Purifier

Unlike money, dust just falls out of the sky. But you can reduce the need to clean by straining particles from the air before they collect on your desk and other surfaces. Small tabletop purifiers will treat the air in one room, while larger units can handle adjacent rooms, and they'll all suck up dust, pet dander, pollen, mold spores, and more. That means you'll be creating a healthier atmosphere in which to breathe, too, which is an excellent investment in your family.

## 3 Dictate Who, What & When

If you're counting on other able-bodied people under your roof to pitch in, use a word-processing or graphic-design program, such as Microsoft Word or Microsoft Publisher, to make a weekly schedule for dividing up the household chores. Then print out copies to give to each individual and hang a master copy where everyone will see it—on the refrigerator, for instance. Whether you've organized your schedule by person or by chore, or set it up like a calendar, keep a blank version as a template file, so you can quickly crank out a new one whenever you need.

## 4 Invest In A Central Vacuum

A central vacuum system eliminates the need to lug around an upright or canister unit. All you need to carry is the power brush and hose, which plugs into wall inlets installed around your home. The actual vacuum unit is situated in an out-of-the-way location, such as your basement or garage, and connects to the inlets via tubes running inside your walls. It's quieter and several times more powerful than a conventional vacuum, doesn't recirculate hot, dirty air in the room you're trying to clean, and will add to the resale value of your home. To check out what's available, visit www.centralvacuumstores.com.

## 5 Create A Playlist For Housework

Research studies show what those of us without white lab coats have always known: Music motivates us physically, keeps us moving, and helps us get more accomplished. Lots of us tap into music's motivational power in the gym, but you shouldn't check your tunes in the locker room. If you have an iPod or other portable music player that supports playlists, put together a high-energy program that will keep you revved up during the drudgery of housework. If you're really creative, try a mix whose tempos match your optimum pace in each different task: vacuuming at one speed, dusting at another, etc.

BY BRIAN HODGE

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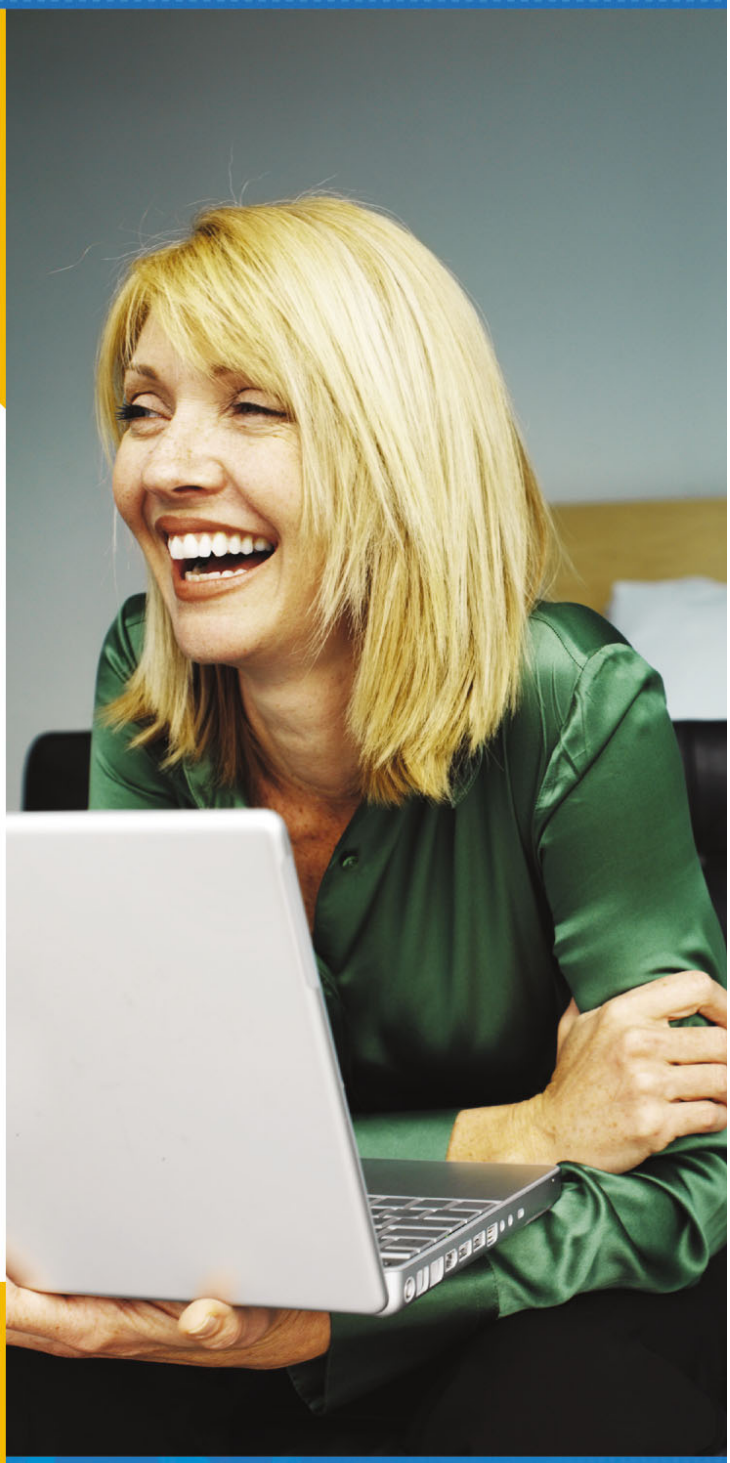

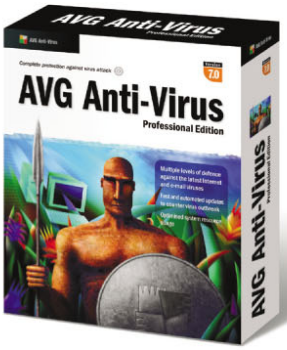


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# First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.


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# The Home System For Your iPod

Wake up to *your* music.

The new iHome iH5 wakes you gradually and lulls you to sleep with your iPod music.

The iH5 Reson8 speakers have incredibly rich, natural stereo sound.

It has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

The iH5 is great in any room in the house. Try one in your kitchen or home office.

## Features:

- Clean, contemporary design complements the look of your iPod
- Wake to your iPod, AM/FM radio, or buzzer
- Removable dock inserts fit all docking iPods*, and unit charges your iPod while docked

Made for iPod

- Adjust preset time to any of seven different time zones with one button; clock also adjusts for daylight savings time automatically
- Gentle wake and gradual sleep lulls you to sleep and allows for a less startling wake-up
- Stereo drivers in specially designed Reson8™ speaker chambers deliver astounding clarity, depth, and power

iHome™
the home system for your iPod®

iPod not included.
*iPod shuffle must use in-line jack.
iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple Computer Inc. in the U.S. and in other countries. iHome and Reson8 are trademarks of SDI Technologies, Inc.

**DLO HomeDock**
MSRP: $99.99
www.homedock.com

# Finally A Home For Your iPod—At Home

You have a case and headphones for taking your iPod on the go, and your car is outfitted with the latest DLO TransPod ($99.99) to enjoy your tunes in the car, but what do you do with your iPod at home? The DLO HomeDock is where your iPod lives—at home. Walk in the door, dock your iPod onto the HomeDock, and enjoy your iPod's music throughout the house.

The DLO HomeDock includes everything necessary to attach your iPod to your home stereo and TV to enjoy its music and pictures. It includes a 14-function remote control, so you can play your tunes from across the room. It also includes a standard AC plug to power and charge your iPod while docked. It even allows you to connect your iPod without removing it from your favorite iPod case. The DLO HomeDock is truly a home entertainment center for your iPod.

## Do You Know How Good Your iPod Really Sounds?

The iPod sounds great through its included earbud headphones. It even sounds great through a set of travel speakers or the DLO iBoom ($99.99). But when you hook up and play your iPod through your professional, high-fidelity home stereo sound system, we bet you'll be blown away by just how good your iPod really sounds.

The DLO HomeDock connects your iPod to your home stereo via the included standard RCA-type plugs and cables. No complicated Y-cables or headphone plugs are necessary. Simply dock your iPod onto your HomeDock, and your iPod's music is sent to your amplifier through the superior audio line-out from the bottom of the iPod. No adapters, no loose cables, just great-sounding iPod music coming through your "real" stereo at home.

## Just When You Thought Tacky Home Slideshows Were Over

The DLO HomeDock also connects to your TV via Composite or S-Video, so you can easily show all those pictures trapped inside your photo-capable iPod. Just dock your iPod, select a photo slideshow, and begin reliving the memories all over again. Control the show from the comfort of the couch with the included remote control. Of course your chosen musical soundtrack still plays through your home-stereo speakers for the proper accompaniment to the big picture show, as well.

DLO DIGITAL LIFESTYLE OUTFITTERS

# Still The Best Car Solution For Your iPod

**DLO TransPod**
MSRP: $99.99
www.dlo.com

Go mobile in style! The DLO TransPod is the ultimate iPod car accessory. The TransPod plays your iPod over your car stereo, charges your iPod, and mounts your iPod wherever you want it—no mess or clutter. And it works perfectly with the new video iPod and iPod nano.

The TransPod broadcasts the iPod's music to any FM radio frequency from 88.1 to 107.9, while simultaneously charging and cradling the iPod in the car. Instead of spending a small fortune on a separate transmitter, charger, and cup-holder cradle, the DLO TransPod combines all of these features into one elegant, cost-effective device.

The new TransPod is a complete iPod solution for your car, yet it requires no installation. This makes it a great alternative to expensive custom installations. Its all-in-one functionality and superior audio performance and sound quality also elevate the TransPod above separate, lower-end, top-mounting FM transmitters. The TransPod works with any dockable iPod, including the new iPod nano.

The all-new DLO TransPod features a smaller, sleeker design with a beautifully curved form and easy-access controls. Its new intelligent power control automatically turns the TransPod on when the iPod is docked and off when the TransPod is not in use. It features front-based tuning buttons for easy navigation of FM stations and side-based buttons that control backlight and preset functions.

**EZPnP EZDigiMusic MP300**
$199
www.ezpnp-usa.com
(800) 828-6475

# Audio CD To MP3 Converter & Player

Now you can convert your audio CDs to MP3 format without a computer. The new EZDigiMusic MP300 from EZPnP Technologies retrieves audio files from a CD via a USB port and converts them to MP3 format with the touch of a single button. Once converted to MP3, you can easily transfer the files to an MP3 player or flash memory card.

EZDigiMusic MP300 was designed to allow a consumer to convert her favorite CD collections directly to a flash-based MP3 player or an SD/MMC (Secure Digital/MultiMedia Card) flash memory card that she can then use in her mobile phone, PDA, or other mobile devices. This will allow users to enjoy true, CD-quality, digital sound on the go.

This revolutionary new product is truly one of the best solutions for helping music lovers encode their entire collection of CDs to MP3 format without using a computer.

Additionally, these MP3-formatted music files can now be utilized and preserved much easier than ever.

EZDigiMusic MP300 provides users the flexibility to retrieve either selected songs or the entire contents of your audio CD in one easy step. Simply plug a flash-based MP3 player or insert a flash memory card into the MP300, and in just a few minutes, digital music files can be transferred to your MP3 player or memory card—and all at CD quality.

As the perfect music accessory for today's busy lifestyles, the EZDigiMusic MP300 is lightweight and portable. It can be powered by either an AC adapter (included) or four AA-sized Ni-MH rechargeable batteries, which allow consumers to enjoy CD quality MP3 music anytime and anywhere.

EZDigiMusic™

**Mitsubishi WD-73927 73-inch 1080p DLP HDTV**
www.mitsubishi-tv.com
MSRP: $7,499

# The Best Mitsubishi Picture Ever

Experience television like you've never imagined possible. Mitsubishi television transcends entertainment to deliver sight and sound magnificence. It immerses your senses with the most advanced technology, features, and performance in the industry, all from the company that invented—and continues to define—television excellence.

## Always-Perfect Picture

Mitsubishi's new high-output 150-watt 1080p DLP light engine coupled with a new generation of advanced digital signal processing for unprecedented picture quality. The all-new Mitsubishi digital light engine features Dark Detailer for deep blacks and rich dark scene detail. And the removable antiglare, high contrast Diamond Shield protects the screen while optimizing picture performance.

## TV Your Way

With Mitsubishi ClearThought technology, digital TV becomes a breeze. Each model is equipped with two HDTV tuners, a CableCARD slot, a 250GB DVR (digital video

recorder) that stores up to 25 hours of HD programming, and TV Guide On Screen. Mitsubishi even adds an ultra-high resolution 1080p Media PC input for the latest generation of HD multimedia applications.

## Other Mitsubishi Features:

- Digital Cable Ready HDTV with CableCARD Slot
- Mitsubishi Exclusive 1080p DLP Light Engine
- Dark Detailer
- Plush1080p
- PerfectColor
- SharpEdge (switchable)
- DeepField Imager (switchable)
- Removable Anti-Glare, High Contrast Diamond Shield
- High Output 150-watt Lamp

MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC
DIGITAL TELEVISIONS

**Toshiba 62HM195 DLP TV**
MSRP: $3,699.99
www.tacp.toshiba.com

CINEMA SERIES® HD

DLP™
A TEXAS INSTRUMENTS TECHNOLOGY

# A Sharp, Smooth & Natural Picture

This TV is a beauty. Check it out for yourself! With this model, Toshiba offers both 1080p and 720p resolution. The TALEN X light engine is an advanced design and uses technology that enhances picture quality and your home theater experience. All 1080p models feature XHD–2X Resolution, which means they have over twice the pixel count of 720p. Both the new TALEN and TALEN X light engines are enhanced with DEEP Picture™ (Digitally Enhanced Engine Performance) technology creating sharper, more vibrant images.

All DLP™ sets offer integrated HDTV tuners and are loaded with features for a smooth transition into HDTV. Toshiba's DLP™ projection TVs are Digital Cable Ready and have the TV Guide On Screen® interactive program guide, for simple, user-friendly channel navigation.

Toshiba offers other DLP TVs in screen sizes ranging from 46 inches to 72 inches and features models in both the Cinema Series® and Theater Wide® models.

Visit www.tacp.toshiba.com for features and a dealer near you.

**TOSHIBA**

Image is Everything.™

**Toshiba Gigabeat**
MSRP: $279.99 to $449.99
www.gigabeat.com

gigabeat
MUSIC IN COLOR™

# Music Is Just Better In Color™

Consumers are excited about the Toshiba's Gigabeat (Music in Color™), which hit shelves in spring 2005. The display and storage capacity has a number of features that promote format flexibility and ease of use.

Gigabeat has a large 2.2-inch QVGA LCD screen and a resolution of 320 x 240 pixels, which is the best picture quality available today. Emphasizing the visual, as well as the audio experience, the Gigabeat lets consumers download their photographs, create slideshows to music, customize their screens and backgrounds, and even attach album covers to each album and track when the art is available.

Moreover, Gigabeat will download and play MP3, WMA, or WAV files. For those of us with large CD collections, gigabeat offers the ultimate in convenience—CD RipRec™. Designed with simplicity in mind, CD RipRec can transfer the contents of an entire CD to the Gigabeat in as little as five minutes.

Covering all of the bases, the Gigabeat is available in distinct colors (silver, blue, black, brushed aluminum, and champagne) and a whopping range of storage (10 to 60GB).

Every Gigabeat comes with an up to 16-hour, rechargeable battery that can be charged via the supplied docking cradle or via a USB cable from any PC.

Visit www.gigabeat.com for features and a dealer near you.

**TOSHIBA**
Image is Everything.™

# music & movies

## music

BY ELIZABETH DIXON

### Rocinate

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: $10

**ESTER DRANG** [Jade Tree]

This album rolls up many genres tight into one. It's the third and most cohesive full-length release from Ester Drang to date. The Oklahoma-based band survived a traumatic car accident while on the road and has lived to tell about it; "Rocinate" is their story.

The music is atmospheric, transcendent, and eclectic; it's jazzy at times with a little added synth for good measure. The band takes harmonic risks and fills in the gaps where other bands leave off. This is like music you've never heard before.

We liked the album from the get go; "Come Back Alive" gets the record off to a pulsating, energetic start. The third track, "Grave Mistake," exposes the jazz tone and shows the band's diverse nature. The almost slow-motion tunes continue, creatively luring the listener in along the way.

This is cloudy-day music that skillfully embodies both fear and hope.

### The Beeps

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: $12.99

**YOKO SOLO** [Quake Trap]

"The Beeps" provides a wonderful escape from the ordinary. While we won't categorize it as techno or party music, this electronic-driven album is close (and we aren't your regular techno fans, either). Its upbeat tone emanates positive vibes that let the listener forget the day's troubles.

### Live In Sydney

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: $16.95

**MICHAEL FRANTI & SPEARHEAD** [Music Video Dist.]

Judging by his music, you're safe to assume that Micheal Franti is always in a good mood. His reggae-infused rock is truly uplifting; the only thing better than his albums is seeing him live. This dual-disc live release provides the chance to hear Spearhead in action.

### Confessions On A Dance Floor

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: $18.98

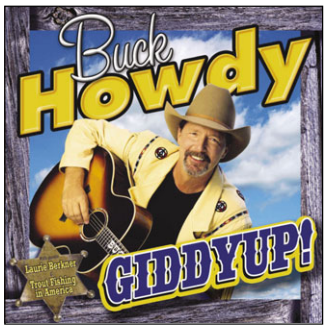
**MADONNA** [Warner Bros.]

We can't say we're huge Madonna fans, but as children of the '80s, we feel like we can't ignore her newest release. The Queen of Pop returns to her dancey roots, with this album brazenly deep-seated in disco. "Confessions" will no doubt make your next party an event to remember.

### Giddyup

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: $13.99

**BUCK HOWDY** [Prairie Dog Entertainment]




If your young children think Madonna is a golden oldie, throw in "Giddyup!" to keep 'em happy and entertained. Mr. Howdy's cowboy fun will drive your children to sing and bop along to his timeless Western hoedown tunes. This is a charming CD for both kids and adults alike.

movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

## The Perfect Man

RATING: PG • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: $29.98

Although it's a far cry from such endearing movies as "Mrs. Doubtfire," "The Perfect Man" has its moments as a parent-child comedy. Teen Queen Hilary Duff ("The Lizzie McGuire Movie") and Heather Locklear ("Melrose Place") anchor the show, with newcomer Aria Wallace providing a hearty share of "cute kid" moments. Holly Hamilton (Duff) grows tired of criss-crossing the country with her mother Jean every time Jean experiences a failed relationship and a broken heart, and Holly concocts a suitor who seems too good to be true. When Jean becomes progressively more enthralled in the mystery man, Holly quickly realizes she's in over her head. "The Perfect Man" is a decent romantic comedy that should also appeal to the tween crowd.

## Charlie And The Chocolate Factory (Two-Disc Deluxe Edition)

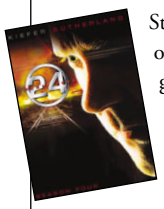
RATING: PG • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: $30.97

When brooding Director Tim Burton ("Edward Scissorhands") joins with one of his favorite brooding actors, Johnny Depp ("Chocolat"), you know the end result is a Willy Wonka who's considerably darker and edgier than the Wonka we remember from our childhoods. Depp also finds familiar castmates in Freddie Highmore, who plays Charlie Bucket, and Helena Bonham Carter, who stars as Mrs. Bucket. A morality tale at its core, "Charlie" follows the reclusive, eccentric Willy Wonka as he searches for an heir to his confectionary wonderland. Technological advancements in filmmaking give this film moments that make it truer to Roald Dahl's novel, and planning a "Chocolate Factory" double feature should satisfy your cinematic sweet tooth.

## TV ON DVD

### 24: Season Four

• AVAILABLE: DEC. 6 • PRICE: $69.98




Still one of the sharpest shows on the small screen, "24" uses a gripping story and bag of plot twists to keep you on the edge of your seat for a solid day. Kiefer Sutherland returns as Jack Bauer, who thinks he's finally left his days at CTU (Counter Terrorist Unit—a fictitious government agency) in the past when the latest national crisis draws him back into the action.

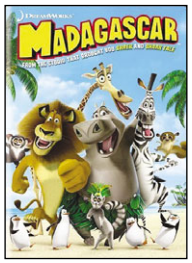
### Seinfeld: Seasons Five & Six

• AVAILABLE: NOV. 22 • PRICE: $49.95

"Seinfeld" was the original show about nothing, and seasons five and six arrive in time for the holiday season. There isn't enough space to list the memorable moments packed into these DVDs. Both sets include commentaries, deleted scenes, and a blooper reel.

## Madagascar

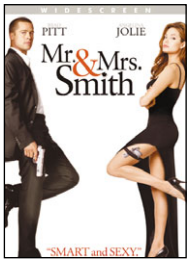
RATING: PG • AVAILABLE: NOV. 15 • PRICE: $29.99




Following a trend that's recently cropped up in animated family films, "Madagascar" pulls in a herd of established actors to voice the movie's central characters. Comedians Ben Stiller and Chris Rock star as the animated animal odd couple of Alex the Lion and Marty the Zebra, respectively. Melman the Giraffe (David Schwimmer) and Gloria the Hippo (Jada Pinkett-Smith) round out the quartet of zoo animals who abandon their swanky New York City Zoo digs in hopes of returning to their roots. Although "Madagascar" fails to offer as much grown-up humor as a film such as "Shrek," its spirit should keep the kids entertained. The plot centers on Alex's and Marty's hunts for their own identities, but the supporting cast of lemurs, penguins, and chimpanzees injects humor when the rather thin plot hints of staleness.

## Mr. & Mrs. Smith

RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOV. 29 • PRICE: $29.98




This is the action film that most consider the catalyst for the end of Brad Pitt's and Jennifer Aniston's marriage and has given tabloids a veritable gossip buffet for months. Pitt ("Seven," "Fight Club") and U.N. do-gooder Angelina Jolie ("Girl, Interrupted," "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider") team up as elite assassins turned spouses who are unaware of each other's true profession. The plot thickens when their respective employers hire them to assassinate the same target. When the target escapes, their employers make their next targets each other. Expect more humor and gunplay than romance and foreplay because Director Doug Liman has cut his teeth on the witty "Swingers" and the Bond-esque spy thriller "The Bourne Identity." Liman's fellow "Swingers" alum Vince Vaughn seems to add laughs at the precise moments.

# games . . .

## for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

### Karaoke Revolution Party Bundle

• PRICE: $59.99 (MICROPHONE INCLUDED)

RATING: EVERYONE 10+

Multiplatform

Konami's Karaoke Revolution Party marks the series' debut on all three major consoles. With 50 new songs, head-to-head competitions, and duet mode, Karaoke Revolution Party lets your inner-American Idol shine through. Not content with supporting multiple microphones for cooperative serenades, Konami added support for Dance Dance Revolution's dance pad; now you can add a little grooving to your crooning. The PS2 version is compatible with the EyeToy, and the Xbox version will let you download additional songs via Xbox Live.

• KONAMI • WWW.KONAMI.COM

### Battlefield 2: Modern Combat

• PRICE: $49.99

RATING: TEEN

Multiplatform

Set in Kazakhstan, Battlefield 2: Modern Combat plunges you into some of the most intense military action you'll find on any console. The game features an enthralling single-player campaign that drops gamers into the middle of a raging war, complete with enough propaganda to make the experience even more realistic. Battlefield 2's real appeal lies in its rich multiplayer capabilities: You and up to 23 friends can engage in online skirmishes on over a dozen maps.

• ELECTRONIC ARTS • WWW.EA.COM

### Mario Party 7

• PRICE: $49.99

RATING: EVERYONE

Game Cube

The latest installment of the fun-for-all game featuring our favorite Italian plumber is a bag of baked tortilla chips and bowl of guacamole away from being a Friday night to remember. Fans of the series will delight that Mario Party 7 lets up to eight players join in the fun. (Previous versions allowed a maximum of four players.) Two new game boards, two new characters, and 86 new minigames should keep you and your clan entertained for hours.

• NINTENDO • WWW.NINTENDO.COM

## Pyramat PM550

• WWW.PYRAMAT.COM • PRICE: $150

The next time you talk your significant other into watching a "chick flick" (his phrase) together, tell him you'll make the earth move for him. He doesn't have to know that you're talking about the matching hers and his Pyramat PM550s you've bought ($150 each; www.pyramat.com). Lie down on these comfy foam mats and plug them into the audio output of your DVD player or surround-sound receiver. You'll feel the rumble of the bass massaging your back as the stereo speakers immerse you in the moment. Of course, a Pyramat is also excellent for unwinding with your iPod at the end of a long day.

## Allume Aquazone Seven Seas Deluxe

• WWW.ALLUME.COM • PRICE: $24.99

Aquarium screen savers are *soooo* retro, and yet you won't be able to tear your eyes away from this one for Windows or the Mac ($24.99; www.allume.com). The fish, turtles, and squid are so photorealistic, you'll think you're watching a Macquarium. You can choose the critters you want in your "tank," including sharks and jellyfish, and can zoom in to follow a particular fish as she swims around. Some of the aquarium settings even invite certain species to interact with the scenery—watch a child's face as a "Nemo" hides in an anemone. For extra fun, click the fish-feeding icon or add your own photo to the rear of the tank.

## Cool Tunes Cooler Bag

• WWW.WISHINGFISH.COM • PRICE: $45

Now we're talkin'. The Cool Tunes Cooler Bag combines everything you need for portable fun at the beach or poolside ($45; www.wishingfish.com /boombag.html). It's a radio, an insulated cooler, and even an amplified speaker set for your MP3 player, all in one. There's room inside the cotton-and-PVC drink compartment for eight cans of soda, which means you could probably fit a wine bottle in there with some effort. A wide, cushioned shoulder strap leaves your hands free as you walk. And the Cooler Bag is waterproof, so you don't have to worry about splashing it as it sits next to the hot tub.

# . . . & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

# what they're SAYIN

BY MRIDU KHULLAR

Gadgets are becoming smaller and easier to take wherever we go, but does that mean most women are using them whenever and wherever they want? Or does each device have its own place in their homes? We rounded up four women in different stages of their lives to tell us where they like to use their devices and why.

## COLLEEN RUKOWICZ

SINGLE WOMAN

Colleen Rukowicz, 19, is a full-time college student, works part-time as an office assistant, and spends most of her time scanning documents into the computer and indexing them.

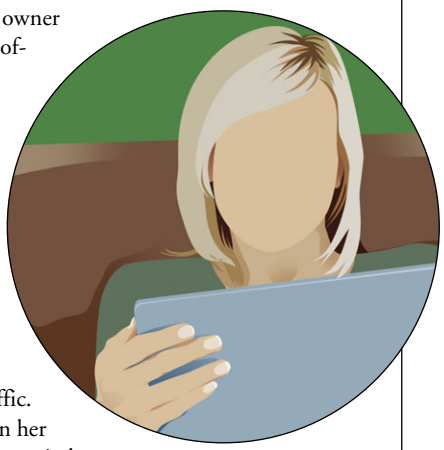
Colleen is particularly fond of her black 5GB Zen Micro by Creative Labs. Her family members, while not extremely gadget-conscious, are often found engaged in a television show, talking on their cell phones, or using the computer both for work and entertainment.

"I use my laptop mostly in the living room sitting on the couch," says Colleen. While she doesn't care much about where in the house the gadgets are used or placed, if she were to buy a big-screen TV and surround-sound system, she'd certainly want them in her living room.

Colleen does believe that how often she uses a particular device would vary depending on where in the house she kept it. "I think accessibility and convenience make a lot of difference as to how much any type of gadget is used," she says. She wouldn't want a separate room for them, though. "I'd use my gadgets less if they were cut off from the rest of the house."

## SALLY FALKOW

NEW EMPTY-NESTER



Sally Falkow, 57, is the owner of two companies. Her office is in Los Angeles, Calif., where she is involved in online public relations. Her second business provides a service for large and small companies who want to use RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds to increase their online visibility and traffic.

Sally loves working on her Toshiba laptop, which has wireless Internet access. It accompanies her throughout the day. Sally's first task of her workday is to open her RSS reader and do a quick scan of selected news items, after which she reads and responds to business and personal email.

When it comes to placement of gadgets inside her home, she doesn't have any particular preferences regarding rooms. While they own a television, a laptop, a digital camera, and iPods, Sally's family would rather not have a separate room for them. The gadgets take their own space in the home office and living room and wherever else they come in handy. "They are integrated into my lifestyle. And my laptop goes with me wherever I go," she says. Sally also feels that how much she uses a gadget wouldn't change depending on where in the house she put it.

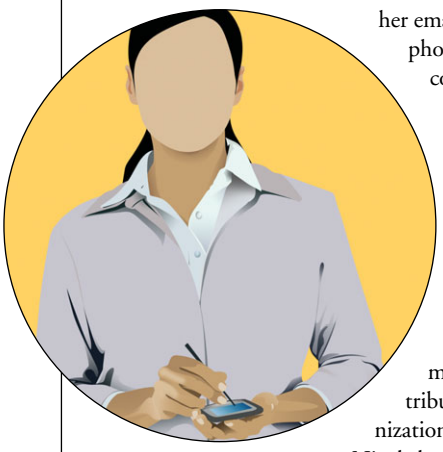
# What Room In Your Home Do You & Your Family Use CE Devices?

## *Where Would You Like to Use Them?*

### NICOLE BISCUITI

BUSINESS WOMAN

Nicole Biscuiti, 25, works at her own family-operated, public relations firm in Boca Raton, Fla. Busy days and hectic evenings ensure that she's constantly checking her email, talking into her cell phone, hosting telephone conferences with long distance clients, entertaining clients at sponsored fundraisers or charity events, and instant messaging with the staff. She literally has every 15-minute increment of her workday scheduled, which is a major factor that contributes to her need for organizational consumer electronics.



Nicole loves her electronics, as anyone can tell from the wide array of CE products that she owns: She uses her HP iPAQ Pocket PC 2200 series every day, as well as her Apple iPod mini, iTunes, and a wireless Motorola V710, which acts as the server for her pocket PC. At home, her family owns multiple Sony digital cameras, MP3 players, and DVD players; a Sony VAIO laptop; Nikon lenses for cameras; and multiple Dell flat-screen computers, all of which are placed in the family rooms, home office, and in separate bedrooms.

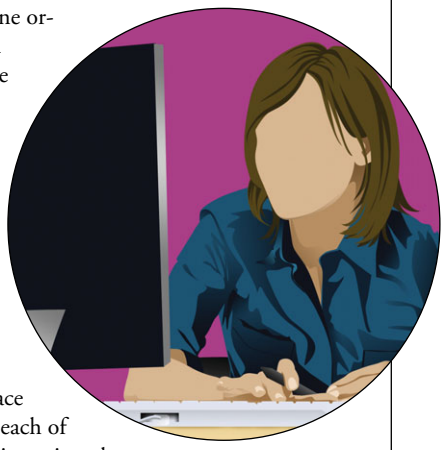
Nicole prefers to keep her CE in designated areas only. "In most rooms, the gadgets that are currently present enhance the functionality of the room to a certain degree," she says. "If I need to use something, I will move rooms to utilize them. The exception is the TV. I'm not a big fan of watching TV and try to limit it." She doesn't like to have any devices in the living room because she feels it would inhibit conversation for some people. And if given a choice, she wouldn't have a technology room, either.

### ANGELA BEACH

MOTHER

Angela Beach, 38-year-old mother of two, is an interior designer who has set up a studio at home to get the flexibility and convenience of working in her own environment.

Her recently renovated office, which now sports tangerine orange walls with birch and white furniture and a lime green sofa, helps keep her mood uplifted. And there's no shortage of gadgets, either. Angela just bought HP's new Media Center PC with a 26-inch widescreen monitor. Her children (6-year-old Brianna and 3-year-old Tyler) share her office space with her, and she's made each of them their own area that is equipped with a computer, their own toys, and memo boards. Needless to say, they love it.



A self-proclaimed gadget addict and eBay junkie, Angela will try just about anything once—twice if it was fun. She loves her Sony P910 cell phone with which she's able to get her email, surf the Web, check messages from her answering service, and send pictures to clients. It serves as a fully functional PDA, too. "You just can't miss with it," says Angela. "It's an office in my purse."

Angela enjoys using her gadgets almost everywhere, and she is surrounded by them at home. "I'm happy with anything anywhere as long as it looks good and does a good job," she says. "If I could afford it, I'd have a totally automated house." Mostly though, she prefers to keep her items where they're the most convenient to use. "I wouldn't have a separate room for the gadgets," she says. Her gadgets need to be accessible all over the house so that they are easy to get to.

### The Last Word

Whether these women's gadgets have a specific place where they usually belong or are strewn all over the place, the women we talked to want convenience. They want to be able to use their gadgets when they want and how they want, without having to make an extra effort to get to them. A computer in the office is great, but a laptop that you can carry along everywhere is even better.

# USE YOUR BRAIN

| left side | right side |
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| Portable Audio for iPods | |
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| XdB™- enhanced Subwoofer | |
| High Efficiency Digital Amplification | |
| Wireless Remote | cool |
| Built-in iPod® Cradle | |
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| Onboard Digital Signal Processor | |
| S-Video Output | |
| Universal Power Adapter | |
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# BOTH SIDES

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exit

## Host A Techie Football Party

Ah, January. Time for nachos, hot wings, friends, and football. What could be better at your next pigskin party? Infusing it with a healthy dose of CE, of course! Welcoming your friends with the latest entertaining gadgets is a great way to warm up on a cold January afternoon, and with these products, everyone will be counting the days until next year's party, too.

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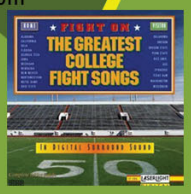

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www.sonystyle.com
$899.95

### VOCOPRO DVD DUET KARAOKE SYSTEM

Something for the kids—and for you?
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The What-a-Croc laptop tote from Melissa Beth Designs can spice up any wardrobe. It's perfect for carrying around your laptop, a novel, your cell phone, and just about anything else you need, plus it has added versatility with its removable Funk-tional Compartment. What could be better?

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- Genuine leather trim
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